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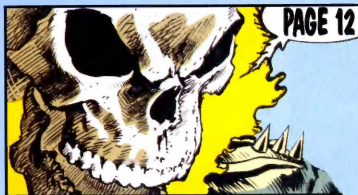
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COMICS SCENE RETURNS soon enough with **Neil Gaiman, Jim Starlin, Don Simpson** and that well-known **World's Finest Team-Up, Batman and Bugs Bunny in COMICS SCENE #26, on sale March 23, 1992.**

Fountains of Youth

It's strange. I can hardly remember a time that I wasn't reading comics. It seems like my whole life has been spent—some might say misspent—with my feet on the ground and my head in a comic book.

When did I start? As the years blur by, I can't recall exactly, but I must have been a precocious five or a probable six—when reading wasn't so much knowing the words as staring at those four-color pictures. And I began with those comics that anyone's parents would be delighted to have them peruse: *Classics Illustrated*.

It was there, with the *Classics*, that I first met Pudd'nhead Wilson, Hamlet and the Sea Wolf. And there I waded through what I consider two of the most insufferable books in the English language (James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and heretically, Herman Melville's much-acclaimed-except-by-me, *Moby Dick*).

After a grounding of *Classics*, it was on to a smattering of DCs, enlistment in the Merry Marvel Marching Society, the appropriate Gold Keys & Charltons, until buying, reading and saving comics was a way of life—something I've been doing for 30 years.

Well, that's my story—or part of it (I may do a mini-series or perhaps a graphic novel). I'm reminded of my comics origins because of how Managing Editor Mike McAvennie, Senior Contributing Writer Will Murray and I spent the weekend—enslaved at Great Eastern's gargantuan NYC Comics Convention. There were the usual elements of a convention: Exhibits, freebies, legions of pros, super-massive congestion, schedule confusion. And there were the fans—many older, carrying almost-near-mint comics in (of course) mylar bags with cardboard backing in briefcases.

But it was the younger ones who amazed me. Hordes of eight and 10-year-olds with understanding parent(s) in tow. Wearing baseball caps emblazoned with favorite teams. And so excited about their chance to get Jim Lee's autograph or Bob Layton's or Kevin Eastman's.

They made me feel young. Well, not young. *Younger*. So excited were they as they navigated this incredibly congested maze of tables filled with writers, artists and editors. It sorta brought me back to a time when all things were new and young and possible in my own personal comics scene, when you could believe that Reed Richards might *really* cure Ben Grimm...that this battle between Hydra and SHIELD could be the *final* epic confrontation, vanquishing that evil organization forever...that Archie would at last choose his *true* love, be it Betty, Veronica or Miss Grundy.

The fans were glad to be there. "Where's Fabian Nicieza?" I overheard one say to another. "I haven't seen Neil Gaiman yet." "Jim Starlin is signing over there." And then, "If I get this autographed, it'll be worth lots more."

That's the one statement that threw me, because I began to wonder just how many of those youngsters were there not for the excitement or the entertainment, but for the investment. Were they getting things autographed just to increase their resale value? Is the comics field veering ever closer to that troubling example of fan-idol interaction: Baseball card shows? Those kinds of cons are gargantuan events, too—but autographs must (frequently) be paid for, the idols (mostly) aren't there to talk to the fans, but just to rake in appearance fees, and the main reason the fans (usually) attend are to fine-tune their card-investment portfolios.

Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with all that; it's just if that's *all there is* (as it seems to be with baseball card shows), it isn't a hobby anymore. And then comics aren't fun and games. Superheroes aren't just for kids anymore; they're for stockbrokers.

I would like to think that most of today's young fans at that con just yesterday—the fans who will hopefully still be reading comics 30 years from tomorrow—were there for the *right* reasons. They wanted to meet Neal Adams because he drew great comics. They chatted with Julie Schwartz and Archie Goodwin because they knew that pair as two of the field's greatest editors. And they asked Chris Claremont to autograph their books because they loved the great adventures he wrote.

Yes, I'd like to think it wasn't for the investment that many of those fans showed up. That's not why I've read comics for 30 years. I read them for the excitement, the entertainment, the escape.

And I hope that's why you read comics, too.

—David McDonnell/Editor

LETTERING

Personal replies are impossible. Other fans & advertisers may contact readers whose letters are printed here. To avoid this, mark your letter "Please Withhold My Address." Otherwise, we retain the option to publish it. Write:
COMICS SCENE
475 Park Avenue So., 8th Flr.
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...I am very upset with the article in COMICS SCENE #23 about Fred Wolf. Fred's overweening ego and apparent willingness to grab credit which is clearly not due him is appalling.

It is true that Murakami Wolf Swenson, the animation studio which produces the animated TMNT TV show, deserves a special place in the history of the TMNT phenomenon. It is even true that Fred Wolf played a key role in said productions. But it is definitely not true that Fred Wolf:

Moved the Turtles into subterranean headquarters (even a cursory perusal of our original comics, beginning with #1, published in 1984, three years before MWS had anything to do with the TMNT, will show that Kevin Eastman and I had placed them there from the beginning).

Gave each turtle a color-coded bandanna (this was a joint idea/decision between Kevin and me and Playmates Toys, part of our efforts to make each Turtle visually distinctive—an essential part of selling toys).

Gave the Turtles new and distinctly different personalities (again, any cursory reading of the original comics will reveal that we had made Leo the serious leader, Don the mechanical whiz, Raph the wise-ass, and Mike the goof. We even wrote personality profiles of all of the key characters for inclusion in the first TMNT role-playing game, published by Palladium Books in 1986—material which was supplied to MWS as reference when they started doing the animation).

"Added Shredder and Krang and gave the Turtles a sidekick, April O'Neil" (we created the Shredder in #1, Krang was only

a tweaking of an established character type—the alien Utroms—from issues #3, #4 and #7, and April O'Neil we created back in #2, where she began her long-running role as a Turtle sidekick).

It's important to remember (and apparently Fred Wolf prefers not to) that MWS was originally engaged by Playmates Toys and directed by them to produce five half-hour episodes of animation, based on our original characters and comic books, but emphasizing the humor and incorporating new elements—such as the different colors for the headbands, the initial belts, and new characters such as Bebop and Rocksteady—that we had created in conjunction with Playmates.

The way Fred tells it, you get this vision of his going to Playmates and saying, "OK, make the action figures' headbands different colors, make a toy blimp because I'm putting one in the show, and while you're at it, make a figure out of this Shredder character we've created."

Uh-uh. No way.

Fred is unique among all of our licensees in that he believes it is his incredible creative genius, rather than the unique appeal of the Turtle characters and story, that has made the animated TMNT series successful. One only has to look at the consistent, across-the-board success of TMNT licensed products to see that Fred Wolf is only one of our many licensees who've had success with our characters. The fact is, the Turtles have been more important to the success of Fred Wolf than Fred Wolf has been to the success of the Turtles.

Peter Laird
Mirage Studios
P.O. Box 417
Haydenville, MA 01309

...Chris Claremont is leaving X-Men?! This is front-page stuff! Why wasn't more of this story reported? Where is Claremont going? John Byrne returns, is this good or bad? X-Men is the only bright spot in Marvel's increasingly dull line of books. Marvel's simple approach to

...ANOTHER SEAN WHO
WON'T BE IN THE
"BATMAN" SEQUEL:



comics really turned me off, and while DC's comics leave much to be desired; at least they have some character depth. Well, anyway, Chris Claremont, good luck. You have made a fan for life.

On another subject, it's getting very hard to find COMICS SCENE and comic books at local stores. Only one store in Washington carries COMICS SCENE, and at least five stores in the last six months have stopped or cut back all their comic book supplies. Is the time coming when you can only find a comic in a comics store?

David Webb
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Washington, NC 27889

...Once in a great while, a person whose particular vision of the human race, with all of its immensities and complex diversities, captures our hearts and our minds and makes us think of all our faults as a race—hatred, racism and self-

serving egotism among them—by making us witness our actions against a fantasy-made minority called mutants. Such were the concerns of Chris Claremont, the man who reshaped comic storytelling in much the same way Star Trek reshaped TV. He made us think of our faults as a race even as we gain renewed strength by facing these negative aspects we possess and embracing our renewed awareness that we are all the same, despite the differences we each have.

Chris Claremont made people think of who they were and of what importance each one, as an individual, had in the world. He used the mutant characters from X-Men naturally, and he strived to give independence and diversity to each one in his attempt to reach each and every racial and economic minority and majority so that all people could have a voice to speak through and be heard.

Chris Claremont made his

characters show us how truly little of a difference there is in us all, when it really comes down to it. But now, Chris Claremont has left a vacancy in our hearts with his leaving of both *X-Men* titles after long disputes with editor Bob Harris. Such a loss to us all.

John Byrne, Jim Lee and others will fill this void, and quite well, too. I have no doubt, but still it pains me to see him leave under such a black cloud, especially with his greatest triumph—a second *X-Men* series—just being released!

Chris Claremont was the kind of comic writer that I and others respected most and wanted to be like. His skill, his insight and his passion will be seen again, no doubt, but not with the team I know he loved the most. Wherever Chris Claremont goes, we, as his fans, will be sure to follow.

Mark R. Daniels
612 Arlington Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45215

...Yes! Call me a masochist, but I would love to see an article on both *Challenge of the Superheroes* and *The Legends of the Superheroes*. Both were (I presume due to their being done on videotape rather than film) tacky, but I can't help but

enjoy the memories of those shows. Please do a feature.

D.T. Sikorski
14603 87th Street
Edmonton, AB
Canada T5E-3G6

...People, there was a time I wasn't impressed with COMICS SCENE. I thought the magazine only had interests in the down, negative type of comic book stories that are so prevalent in the industry these days. But thankfully, that's no longer the case. After reading issues #21 and #22, I have noticed that you are getting back to the animation industry. The recent voice-over interviews (Janet Waldo, Henry Corden, Jean Vanderpyl) have been gratefully appreciated, especially since I have always been curious about these people who have become almost like family to us.

Those interviews are simply great and they help to fill up some more blanks in animation history. Because these wonderful folks are such an integral part of the cartoon world, I am glad to know a little bit more about them. I hope in the future you can track down interviews with Penny Singleton (Jane Jetson) and Don Messick (Scooby-Doo).

Some time ago, I wrote ask-

ing that you interview the people involved with the Disney Afternoon. Now, thankfully, you have, starting with this great article on *Darkwing Duck* (a highlight for me). Please continue with more such articles.

Also, do more such episode guides to *Tiny Toons* and others. They are appreciated, and I loved the first season guide to *TazMania*. It helps me keep track of the episodes. Please keep this up.

James Smith III
Apt. 108
207 State Street
Grand Forks, ND 58202

For other cartoon voices, see the interviews with Mel Blanc (*STARLOG* #102), Daws Butler (#116) and Don Messick (#111).

...I think showing characters like *Batman* in alternate settings in history is a great idea, but there are some historic settings I would not put him in, as he would be redundant with other fictional heroes who are too much like him. For example, I wouldn't put him in the Old West with Zorro and the Lone Ranger. I also wouldn't put him in the French Revolution, since they already have the Scarlet Pimpernel.

RULE #1 IN THE ROCKETEER COSTUME HANDBOOK:

DON'T LEAN BACK IN THE LA-Z-BOY.



I would like to put him with other heroes who are not so much like him to see how they respond to him. What do you think Sherlock Holmes thinks of the *Gotham* by Gaslight *Batman*? Would Holmes work with him?

David Rubin
57 Floyd Street
Staten Island, NY 10310



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Luke Cage has gone through a great many changes since his introduction in the '70s. Debuting as *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire*, he became *Power Man*, then teamed up for *Power Man & Iron Fist* before his first series was cancelled. This time around, though, writer Marc McLaurin and penciller Dwayne Turner are going back to the basic character with *Cage*. His return, reveals McLaurin, was truly a matter of popular demand.

"People love the character. I'm not sure why the book was originally cancelled, but I do know from my convention appearances that he's a character who is still very much on the readers' minds," he says.

According to McLaurin, one of the reasons *Cage* has been gone so long is that no one knew how to bring him back.

"Much of it after his cancellation had to do with figuring out what to do with the character that wouldn't be more of the same. In Marvel's past revivals—*Deathlok*, *Ghost Rider*—the way they were brought back was part of the appeal. Marvel wanted the proposal to explain, 'How is this new and different? Why are these stories worth being told?'"

When Luke Cage appeared in the final issues of *Power Man & Iron Fist*, he was accused of *Iron Fist's* murder. *Cage* escaped from police custody and went on the run. Now, he has suddenly appeared in Chicago.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

UNCAGED AGAIN

Luke Cage is back in business as a hero for hire.

"We're trying to be careful," McLaurin notes, "because Luke Cage has been out of the public eye for so long. His re-introduction will be based on where he left off, but with elements of his past that are new for both the new and old readers."

"He's turning up in Chicago; his record has been cleared. The charges against him were flimsy at best, and we'll deal with the reason why those charges were brought against him in the first place. We're finding out the real story behind that death in *Namor*, who it was that died when we saw *Iron Fist* die," McLaurin says. "The other half of the story will be in the pages of *Cage*—why *Cage* was charged with the murder."



The "man on the run" aspect of *Cage* will be dropped, indicating a new take on the character.

"*Luke Cage* has run away all his life. He escaped his gangland past to try and lead a respectable life, but his life was wrecked and he was sent to prison. He escaped from prison, and in *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire* #1, there was what turned out to be a throw-away bit nobody picked up on, which is that Luke Cage *isn't* his real name. He changed his name because he was an escaped con trying to work as a hero for hire, but in the first issue [of the retitled] *Power Man & Iron Fist*, he legally changed his name to Luke Cage when all the charges against him were dropped—which is sort of

redundant! We'll reveal what he was escaping from in changing his name.

"This is a series about a man who learns that you can't run away from your past, because it catches up to you," adds McLaurin, who notes he was interested in the title because *Luke Cage* is a strong black character.

"There aren't that many strong black characters or strong female characters—it's just a different take on the status quo," he observes. "Not only that, Luke Cage is an interesting, solid character. He has his own nobility about him, but he's not out there to avenge the murder of anyone or make up for a mistake he made in his past. He's a man trying to make a living at doing what he does best."

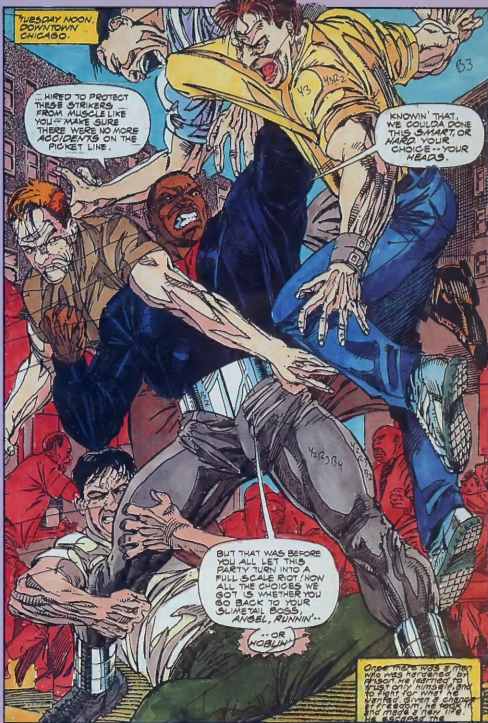
which is the American dream! He's good with his fists, he's super-powered and he can be a super-strong hero for hire in a world where there are super-powered menaces. He doesn't just throw on a costume when he sees trouble. He's hired to take on specific jobs."

One of his supporting characters in Cage was previously seen as a private investigator in her own limited series. "Dakota North works mainly for *The Chicago Spectator*, a newspaper looking to create a new media niche. Luke sets up a deal so that the newspaper gives him free advertising and pays his expenses for the jobs that he gets through them, so he'll have no overhead. In exchange, the newspaper gets exclusive stories on his exploits. Dakota North will have investigated Luke Cage and discovered his past and his past associations. She'll be shedding some light on why he changed his name, and what in his past triggered the need for him to keep starting over."

Much of Cage's previously unknown early days will be uncovered in this new series.

Says McLaurin, "We'll be learning about his mother and father, his history with the gangs, how he escaped from the gangs—Cage started off the last series thinking his father had died while he was in prison. He's going to find out that his father was still alive then. His brother informed him that their father basically died of shame, because he was an ex-cop and had a son in prison. We'll find out that his brother may have been lying."

Some old Cage co-stars will be returning, including Iron Fist and Misty Knight. "Iron Fist will be back around issue #12. When Iron Fist came back as Danny Rand in *Namor*, it was actually the Super-Skrull, and so when Luke saw Danny Rand return,



The scribe describes Luke Cage as not just a superhero, but "a man trying to make a living at what he does best."

he tried to call him and was rebuffed, because it was actually the Super-Skrull not wanting to associate with Cage," McLaurin says. "Luke doesn't want an explanation for it anymore, because his best friend—who he took the murder rap for—died and suddenly reappeared without a word to him."

A rather intricate web will be wound around Cage during the first year or so of his new series. "There will be several missions that are seemingly unconnected, but will be revealed to be connected by a central force. There are forces from his past that are out to get Cage, and there's a very powerful central force manipulating his life a little at a

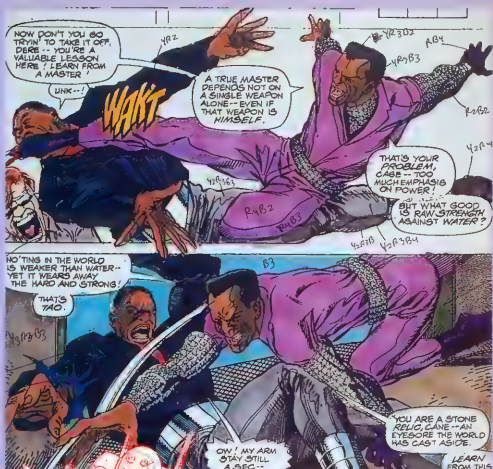


McLaurin's revitalization of Cage offers "a new attitude based on the old attitude."

time. Their goal is to mentally and emotionally destroy him, which will put him in a better position for how they want to use him."

Cage will be seeing new villains. "One of them is related to an old villain," McLaurin reveals. "Cruz Bushmaster is the son of Bushmaster, the only other person ever to share the power of Power Man. The son is now in control of a powerful Maggia empire—basically, a European Maggia looking to expand into the United States as a result of the power vacuum left by the Kingpin's fall.

"Chicago is traditionally a big organized-crime town, and so we'll have some power struggles there. Cruz Bushmaster is out to destroy Luke Cage. Working for him is a recurring new villain from the Caribbean, Hardcore. He's everything that Cage isn't, or everything that people perceive Cage as not being. Cage is big and strong, and Hardcore is small and wiry; Cage relies on his fists, and Hardcore, on his weaponry. He's like a killer bee, and a master strategist. Cage has to learn how to plan ahead and not just react," says McLaurin, who also points out the series will feature existing villains.



Cage is "a super-strong hero for hire in a world where there are super-powered menaces," the writer notes.

If Cage is going to survive in the '90s, he had better "learn to plan ahead and not just react," warns Marc McLaurin.

"Tombstone is going to be in the same issue as Nitro, and Nitro's going to become a recurring villain—he's Cruz's hitman, and Hardcore has gotten him out of prison. As a result of coming into contact with Cage, the Punisher will guest star in an issue, and Nitro will undergo changes that make him a powerful Cage villain.

"We'll also have a new character called Kickback, who can jump two or three minutes backwards or forwards through time. It's a really cool power, but difficult to explain!"

McLaurin is grateful to the writers and artists who kept Cage going in the first series, but says he doesn't feel closely bound to what Don McGregor, Archie Goodwin, Billy Graham and others have done. "I think their work established the characters really well. They made the character great, but it's my personal preference not to come onto a book and say how everyone who did the character before me was not up to snuff! It's not the same interpretation of Luke Cage that I will take, but they kept him alive for so many years."

Revising a '70s character for the '90s has its pitfalls, though, the writer admits. "You have to avoid rewriting history and saying, 'This never happened.' On the other hand, you don't want to be slavishly (continued on page 58)

Wheels of Fire

Blazing into artistic action, Mark Texeira rides with the Ghost Rider.

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

In his big leather jacket and devil-may-care grin, Mark Texeira looks like he stepped out of a comic book. One can easily imagine the young, Portuguese artist roaring around on an Akira bike as he performs the same motorcycle stunts as his characters Ghost Rider and Punisher—stunts that would leave a lesser man in traction. One can easily imagine that scenario, but it's dead wrong. "I would love to ride a motorcycle, but I can't even drive," he admits. "I spend so much time behind the drawing board, I can't seem to find the time to get driving lessons!"

Despite his pedestrian status, the illustrator is currently riding a crest of success due to his work on the new Ghost Rider, a character who first appeared 20 years ago as a combination of those two early '70s icons: Evel Knievel and *The Exorcist*.

The artist landed the assignment thanks to another tough hero. "I did five issues of *Punisher War Journal*, and somewhere in the middle of those, [artist] Javier Saltares, a dear friend of mine—actually, my brother-in-law—said he liked what I was doing with the book's dark mood and tones, and he asked me to ink *Ghost Rider*. I refused and told him I was the wrong guy for it: his work needed somebody clean, who could polish it up, and I wasn't that person.

"He argued that he wouldn't mind. I said, 'Take my work to [*Ghost Rider* editor] Bobbie Chase and see if she likes me. At that point, I thought she would throw it right into the garbage, 'cause they were just a bunch of Xeroxes. She liked 'em, we did the first issue and the book took off.'" The title has since become one of Marvel's top-sellers. "We were all shocked; we never expected *Ghost Rider* to be the hit that



Art: Mark Texeira/Jama Palmioti

it is," he admits. "No one did. Marvel [staffers] are still scratching their heads wondering why a book they're not pushing is selling close to half-a-million in average sales at \$1.75, and he's *not* a mutant! He's a brand new character, and sales should have been down in the 40s out of the top 50. *Ghost Rider* does better than *Hulk*, *Thor* and other mainstream Marvel books. Howard [Mackie, writer, CS #12] deserves the credit, and I genuinely love the character."

"Marvel can't figure out his popularity. They can't figure out why it's selling, because they're not advertising him like *X-Men* and *Spider-Man*. I can't fight the people at Marvel to push the book anymore, but I'm glad the audience is there."

Now the "Spirit of Vengeance" will be pulling double duty. "Howard asked and we've been approved by the editor to start a regular, painted *Ghost Rider* series. I want to continue the character, but I want to use as many means as possible. It's a larger channel, with much more freedom to move. I would love to paint it monthly, but I think it'll take me two months to do the first issue, and I'll work my speed up as I go along. I would love to do it monthly. I've seen Simon Bisley do it with *Slane* and Bill Sienkiewicz do it with *Elektra*. I can't wait to paint it; I've already started tonal drawings."

Teixeira defers all credit for the hero's success. "Javier took great pleasure in developing the new cycle," his brother-in-law says proudly. "Javier wouldn't do the character unless he was allowed to re-create him. They really fought tooth-and-nail on getting his position on that. I wasn't involved in creating the character; I just took it on from what Javier established. I haven't changed him much. I've just brought the audi-

Photo: Lisa Orris



Although Texeira loves drawing *Ghost Rider*, "I don't take comics seriously."

Art: Mark Texeira/Photo: Lisa Orris



No matter how Teixeira draws him, "You'll never see the *Ghost Rider* smile!"

ence closer to the action and exposed other character nuances."

The illustrator thinks the skull-headed cyclist's appeal is "his darkness. He's a rich, dark character who's also benevolent. I like the idea that I'm left to do the book all on my own with hardly any restrictions. I know the restrictions—no blood, no wounds; they're small and few."

Teixeira feels the book's greatest asset is its atmosphere. "I hope the audience realizes that, although the writing is important, the character's more based on the art; it's really an arty book inspired by the original Bernie Wrightson *Swamp Things*. It's funny, because I never really looked at any of Wrightson's *Swamp Things*, but I loved the character's moodiness back in the '70s. I should buy a few of them! I used to love the original *Ghost Rider* because of that great

The artist explores the Marvel Universe in the 30th century in an upcoming *Guardians of the Galaxy*.

Art: Jan Valtasson/Mark Texeira



All *Ghost Rider*, *Punisher*, *Spider-Man* & *Guardians of the Galaxy* © & TM Marvel Entertainment Group

DEATHWATCH
WILL DIE FOR THIS!



Artist Mark Texeira likes taking his frustrations out on *Ghost Rider*.

Mike Ploog art. I thought he was the *Ghost Rider* artist, but I guess he tired of the character. I admire and respect Ploog. The *Terminator* also influenced me because of his stout and stoic approach to applying himself to one mission," says Texeira. "I just wish *Ghost Rider* wouldn't repeat his vengeance thing so often. I would like to see him use another avenue."

Teixeira realized his life's ambition at an early age. "In the eighth grade, one Saturday I rode into Manhattan on the 'A' train and found myself in front of the Marvel building. They weren't open, but I realized I would love to work for these people. I decided then that I wanted to work in this industry."

"I spent the next few years, from ages 13 to 19, showing my portfolio to Vince Colletta, a DC art director. I was constantly being rejected, but I

was developing my skills. I guess he got tired of me and gave me work! Joe Orlando allowed me to do backgrounds for him, and then Rich Buckler let me assist him on *Superman* vs. *Shazam* and a few other DC books.

"Eventually, I got my break on *Warlord*, right after Mike Grell. He hated my work. I was very bad at it, and was only allowed five issues. I was then appointed to DC's advertising corner and wasn't heard from for about three years, doing various merchandising. He-Man toys and *Superman* dishes. I accepted no credit on them. *Power Lords* was a three-issue series I did, probably the worst comic book ever created.

"When you're 20 and breaking in, you take the job. I left DC after three years because I realized I wasn't getting anywhere. Nothing against DC, but I don't feel as though I'll ever get anywhere there," he says. "I would

All Ghost Rider Art: Mark Texeira

love to do *Batman* and *Superman*, but the only way I would ever do it is if they allowed me to pencil, ink and write the book, or," he smiles, "do it with Alan Moore!"

"I showed Marvel a portfolio of my DC work, but Tom DeFalco hated anything that showed DC's standards. I had to come back and show some Marvel-like work. Tom liked the portfolio the second time around. I drew a *Spider-Man* origin and three pages of *Avengers*. I was accepted to do *Buckaroo Banzai*. I thought it was the death of my career, but I was willing to do the floors at Marvel just to get in! That led to my doing *Sectaurs* and *Psi-Force* for Jim Shooter's New Universe. What fun that was—I've done a lot of losers!"

"Since I thought I was dead in the water, I decided in the middle of a book called *Skyhawks* to add light sources and make a real attempt at cartoon animation. That book was cancelled, and I decided to leave comics and do advertising. In '87, I painted a few assignments for *New York Magazine*.

"I went back to Marvel, and did the first *Punisher Annual* with Scott Williams inking. I then went to Continuity to work for Neal Adams. I really admired him, but I left to stretch my wings. He wouldn't allow me to ink any of his books. He let me pencil, but I got tired of doing his books, and wanted to do his advertising. After a year of that, I figured if I was going to be limited to doing comics, I might as well do them my way. I inked Jose Delbo on *Conan*," he chuckles. "Jose hates my work, because I've altered him so much!"

The artist has a wish list of favorite characters. "I have several I can't wait to get my hands on," he professes. "Daredevil and Wolverine, not only because he's a mutant, but because he has real guts and could easily be a dark character. I did *Batman* once, but he's too strung a style for me. He's fun though. I enjoy dark characters. I like characters making guest appearances. I don't think I did a very good *Spider-Man* [in a *GR* guest shot]. I'll have to work on him. I don't know what Todd McFarlane has, but I would like to squeeze him for information!"

Teixeira learned from the spectacular *Spider-Man* artist's use of his character. "I loved McFarlane's *Ghost Rider*," he states. "If you look at the *Ghost Rider* I drew before his rendition in *Spider-Man*, the flames I rendered weren't as accurate and exciting. When I saw McFarlane's, I realized the character could use a bit more excitement. I love Todd's abstract approach to comics, and yet he keeps it appealing."



After the success of *Ghost Rider* #15, Teixeira would like to do more glow-in-the-dark covers.

His current assignments are also very appealing. "I was gonna leave *Ghost Rider* on issue #12, because I was tired of inking over Javier. I knew he wanted to ink his own book as much as I wanted to pencil and ink mine. I told Bobbie I was leaving, and she offered *Ghost Rider* to me as a regular series. I accepted, although I knew there was some kind of turmoil between Bobbie and Jay.

"Now, I'm leaving with issue #24 and going back to *Punisher*, because

I like the character and always have. Chuck Dixon's coming back on the series, and I think he's one of the greatest writers in comics. He does the *Punisher* with just the right blood-and-guts mood. Chuck's down-to-Earth, full of mood and feeling rather than just place-to-place action, moving the character through the motions just to complete a certain as-

Wolverine is one of several characters the illustrator would love to do.

Art: Mark Teixeira/Photo: Lisa Oris



When Texeira ends his run on *Ghost Rider*, he'll be setting his sights on another Marvel vigilante.

Texeira enhanced *Ghost Rider*'s fiery look after seeing his Todd McFarlane-drawn appearance in *Spider-Man*.

signment. It's good for one or two issues, but it gets boring. I would rather he get in situations that conceal his identity." The artist laughs. "That sounds so Clark Kent-ish!"

Despite being a "fan favorite," he tries to keep the acclaim in perspective. "When I was younger, coming from a poor family and being Spanish—where are the violins?—I couldn't really make any demands on my career. Now, I pick my projects. I see myself heading toward the field of illustration outside of comics. I don't take comics that seriously," he jokes. "If I did, I would be as insane as most writers!"

One of Texeira's more offbeat projects was a comic called *Stalkers*.

"That was a great stage for my inking; I was able to experiment and stretch my figures. I started it off violently and was told to tone down the violence. I felt restricted, so I left after issue #6," he states. "That was the end of that series. I liked working with Mark Verheiden."

He also adapted Jack Kirby's *Eternals*, but didn't consult the comics legend about his creations. "I admire too many people in this field and I'm very coy in my approach. I tried to interpret his characters my way. *Marvel Comics Presents* is a very hard thing to do because you stop every six to eight pages and retell the story constantly—it's very boring. The *Eternals* were originally supposed to be in that, but the geniuses at merchandising felt it should be compiled into a graphic novel, then they felt it should be a regular book, but no one advertised it, so the sales flopped and the characters had no chance to be exposed. It was an utter failure."

On the opposite end of the spectrum was Texeira's bestselling glow-in-the-dark *Ghost Rider* cover. "I would like to do more glow-in-the-dark covers," he notes. "Again, Marvel was shocked that the [glowing cover] book even had orders up to 800,000. They hadn't planned to go that far. I don't think Marvel would mind letting it drop off. He's like Conan—he doesn't seem to fit in with the rest."

Marvel's maniac motorcyclist may be heading for Hollywood. "There are constant rumors that they're going to do a movie version of the original [Johnny Blaze] *Ghost Rider*, but I think it's just talk," he states. "New Line Cinema was thinking of doing it. When I went to see the fifth *Freddy Krueger* film, there was a scene where Krueger wraps wire around some boy on a motorcycle, and he rides off with a flaming head. I thought, 'Whoa, they can do it!' I would like to see a *Ghost Rider* movie," he declares. "New Line would be perfect. They can handle fear easily and smartly."

As so much of his work is dark, one wonders if Mark Texeira has considered a "lighter" strain of adventure. "Yeah, I'm doing *Gumby Goes to Hell*," he quips. "Actually, I thought about doing a realistic version of *Mighty Mouse*, which would be goofy and fun, but then I woke up. My Christina just loves Walt Disney's *Little Mermaid* so much that I think she has worn out the tape! I would like to do something for my kids to read, but I take great pleasure in the resolution of evil, whether it be personal or emotional. You'll never see the *Ghost Rider* smile!"

*The New Mutants & X-Force made him a big name
in comics, but Rob Liefeld owes his success to*

YOUNG BLOOD

By MIKE
McAVENNIE

All Youngblood Art: Rob Liefeld/Courtesy Malibu Comics



It is said that for every action, there is a positive or negative reaction. For the past two years, the reaction to Rob Liefeld's actions in *The New Mutants* and *X-Force* have been overwhelmingly positive, and he has established himself as a premier figure in the comics industry. After working on various projects and one-shots for both Marvel and DC Comics, he became *The New Mutants*' artist with issue #87. Within a year, he took over as plotter to finish off the title's last three issues, then assembled the remains of the New Mutants and launched *X-Force*, which has proven to be a fan favorite in its first year.

Capitalizing on his success, Liefeld (who discussed *X-Force* in CS SPECTACULAR #4) has decided to return to the super-team that always played a very important part in his career, yet never appeared anywhere—until now. After a six-year wait, *Youngblood* is debuting in a three-issue mini-series from Malibu.

"*Youngblood* has a history to it. It's almost ridiculous," laughs Liefeld, who serves as the book's plotter and illustrator. "It's actually the first thing I decided to do in comics. When I was just breaking in around 1985, my friend [scripter/former CS contributor] Hank Kanalz and I developed *Youngblood* and its concept. We took it to several small publishers and decided to work with Gary Carlson of Megaton Comics. There was this thing called 'The Megaton Explosion' that came out around 1985-86, which was a *Who's Who/Marvel Universe*-type book for the Megaton characters and their universe. It had a double-page spread featuring *Youngblood* and about eight of its characters, and it described who each character was and the book's concept. I did a couple of ads for the book and actually pencilled an entire first issue. I was ready to go with it.

"Then, I started getting overwhelmed by some of the work I was doing for Marvel and DC, and I decided that I had to make that stuff my priority. There was no way I could continue the body of work that I wanted to do with *Youngblood*, so there was no point in just putting out one issue. I was extremely slow in producing the work at that time, so we just shelved it. There's an actual first issue that's just sitting in my drawer that, ironically enough, got me my work at DC and Marvel. I used those pages as samples around convention time in spring 1986, and those samples got me hired by Marvel and DC. So, there's a weird irony here.

"I've talked to Malibu about doing a *Youngblood* special, where we can actually publish that issue," Liefeld adds. "I would probably finish inking some of the pages, but it has already

X-Force plotter/artist Rob Liefeld will focus on the team's leader in the upcoming mini-series, *Cable: High Lord*.



Great X-ceptions

Although Rob Liefeld is preparing to launch readers into the *Youngblood* universe, don't think he has forgotten about *X-Force*, the Marvel mutants who brought him into the comics limelight.

"By this summer, *X-Force* will become Public Enemy #1," the artist/plotter reveals. "SHIELD, the Avengers and X-Factor will all be hunting them down. The story will take a real interesting twist when Cable has to seek refuge for himself and the team, and readers will be surprised to see who they seek it with and from."

However, not everyone on the team will be able to seek shelter. "In issue #7, Sam [Cannonball] is killed, but there's more to that than meets the eye, and you've just got to hang on. With that issue and the storyline that ensues, you find out a lot about Cable and why he originally came to the New Mutants.

"I didn't say Sam was dead," Liefeld stresses. "All I said was that he gets killed, and that should be crystal-clear. I don't want to give anything away, but you will find out a lot about both Sam and Cable."

Much of the mystery surrounding Cable will begin unraveling in *Cable: High Lord*, a mini-series plot-

ted and drawn by Liefeld and slated for a late-spring release. "This whole thing with Sam spins directly into the Cable mini-series." As for what the sub-title represents, he says, "Don't ask. Don't assume, just hang on for the ride. By the end of that mini-series, Cable will have been violated, stripped and put to the task. The readers will have the benefit of having many questions about Cable answered, but the character is going to be a complete stranger to himself. It'll be a lot of fun, fun, fun, fun."

Liefeld refuses to elucidate on the *High Lords*, but promises that this storyline "is the most important thing that will run through *X-Force* for the next year-and-a-half to two years. They're the next evolution of mutants. I don't want to reveal too much, but the *High Lords* concept is something I'm real excited about, and it will eventually affect all the mutant books.

"By *X-Force* #9, I believe the readers will be completely shocked, but excited, about what's happening. We're doing things with characters that have never been done before, and we're revealing more than ever. You're going to find out why Cable showed up when he did in [*New Mutants*] #87, and this is how all

these other characters tie into this: Gideon, the character who was introduced in *New Mutants* #98, is crucial to the whole thing. So are Deadpool and Domino. Mr. Tolliver, whom we've mentioned only a few times and just seen a hint of in shadows in recent issues, is also crucial.

"There are some deep, dark secrets concerning Deadpool and Domino that will be revealed by issue #10," he continues. "In *X-Force* #2, we introduced a new Weapon X, and in issue #6, he pops up again in a back-up story that will last for several issues. By the end of that story, which is issue #10, all heads will be turning. Then, there'll also be a fall crossover called 'Sins of the Father,' which involves the X-Men, X-Force and X-Factor."

According to Liefeld, this storyline will continue for quite some time, but the end results will be well worth the wait. "I've got to be honest," he says. "With *The New Mutants* #98-#100, we had to end that series, and end it fast. I had to get certain things in motion that would help set up *X-Force* pronto. But now, I reveal that stuff and say, 'Yeah, some things may have happened faster than they should have, but we got all the information we needed into that.'

"Everything that has been going on—little hints, little things that have maybe frustrated people—it's all part of a large plan. It's one large scheme. This book isn't being plotted by the seat of its pants; it had a large structure to begin with. It has a large goal that it's going towards, and it all wraps up nice and neat by issue #16.

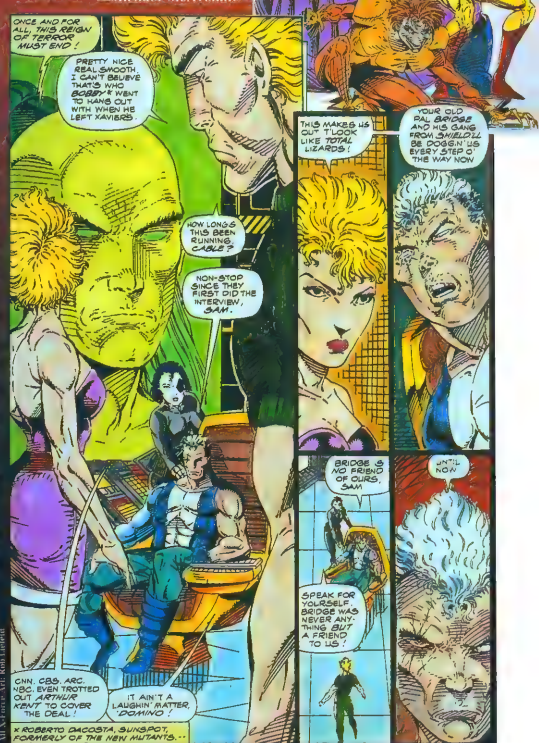
"I'm real excited. With everything that has been happening in *X-Force*, we couldn't just come out and do all this in issue #1. We had to build things up. Some people say, 'Oh, that Spider-Man/X-Force crossover was nothing.' No, the ramifications are very real and important to the X-Force team, to the story and to all the characters. I've heard criticisms that it wasn't a crossover, that it wasn't anything. No, it was actually just good, plain fun. When the Thing and the Hulk used to beat each other up and spend two issues doing it, it was just comics done the Marvel way. But Cable, Black Tom Cassidy, the Juggernaut, the blowing up of the Trade Center being pinned on X-Force, Gideon...all this *had* to happen for all the really cool stuff to get in motion. So, there are many interesting things that are going to be

happening, and I'm as excited about *X-Force* as I am about anything."

Once Rob Liefeld completes his current workload, he thinks he might take a little rest. "When I'm done with the stories that I want to tell in *X-Force*—at least, the first initial story, I'm going to have to sit back and say, 'OK, what do I want to do next?'" Actually, when you figure in the Cable mini-series, which is part of that *X-Force* storyline, it'll be about a 20-24 issue run that I took on. I've been working with these characters for a long time, and thank God they're not hurting to me yet. But then, a year ago, I wouldn't have known that all this would be happening, but I'm glad it is."

—Michael McAvennie

Everyone's gunning for X-Force, even the new Brotherhood of Evil Mutants.



ALL X-Force Art: Rob Liefeld

According to Liefeld, *X-Force* will be hard to seek refuge from its growing list of enemies.



According to Liefeld, Youngblood's home unit "serves as an FBI function..."



Photo: Courtesy Rob Liefeld

Even before he showed off his 501 butterfly jeans and X-Force, Rob Liefeld was inspired by "the MTV generation" to create *Youngblood*.

been pencilled. Hopefully, sometime it can see the light of day."

Bringing *Youngblood* to the comics scene was simple enough for Liefeld, as was his choice of publisher. "I've always liked the independent marketplace. I love the Marvel and DC comics; that's what I grew up on. But, in my early- to mid-teens, the independent marketplace really exploded, and I got into stuff like *Grimjack*, *Sable*, *Starslayer*, *The Rocketeer* and *Ms. Mystic*. The independent marketplace lures me because I look at Marvel and DC and think, 'How many more super-teams and characters can comfortably fit into the confines of the universes that they've [DC/Marvel] created?' But, in your own universe, you get to set and break the rules. It's your own playground."

Realizing that such a playground might not fit in at DC or Marvel, the plotter/artist decided to open up his park at Malibu. "I knew [Malibu publisher] Dave Olbrich, who has always been a really great guy. When the opportunity came, I mentioned it to him. A few months later, he called me back and asked, 'Are you still interested in doing this?' I said, 'As a matter of fact, I've been working on a new *Youngblood* project on the side,' just so that, when the time came, I had a body of work that would be ready to go again. So, we just set this whole thing up."

According to Liefeld, much of the concept behind *Youngblood* evolved as a result of growing up in "the MTV-generation music videos in front of your face all the time, all those commercials and fast images, 24-hour news networks. One day, I started thinking, 'If superheroes really did exist in the world, how would they affect us?' Not who would fight them or what crimes would they solve, but how would it affect us? The media would certainly latch onto them. If



...while the away team functions outside the U.S. in a CIA-type capacity.



Brahma and the moisture-manipulating Riptide are Youngblood members who would rather be elsewhere, reveals Liefeld.

there were superheroes, they would be the trendsetters, the guys who impact how people think, and they would be watched 24 hours a day."

"If there really was a guy who could fly and hurl buildings at people, this guy would be incredibly pursued," he continues. "And in today's marketplace, he would just be hit from everything. I'm sure he would get corporate sponsors asking, 'Would you sell my product?' 'Would you be the spokesman?'"

"In the Youngblood universe, the nuclear power race isn't the big race anymore. It's still a super-powers race, but it's now very literal. From genetic engineering to technological advances, the first few seeds of what became extraordinary individuals have now blown into a race to see who can create the better supermen. And the elite of these, in America at least, are part of a government team called Youngblood."

Despite the singular name, Youngblood is actually broken up into two teams, with each group consisting of six members. "One team serves as an FBI function, and the other as a CIA function," Liefeld explains. "I refer to them as the home team and the away team, because just as the CIA functions outside America and the FBI functions inside, that's how these two operate."

That concept will be made clear in the first issue: The home team tackles U.S. corporate-owned super-villains, while the away team confronts "a Saddam Hussein-type who has been exploiting the use of genetic engineering and more technological and chemical advances—he's a mass terrorist. Basically, I just lifted it from what

happened a year ago with Desert Storm. In this scenario, however, instead of 500,000 troops being dispatched, one tight unit of Youngblood is sent in to do the job and get it done quickly. They're sent in to knock out this threat and the advances he's making, and there's some international intrigue as to with whom he's allying himself.

"There's a great deal of action and adventure dealing with different menaces, but you'll also see what the heroes do afterwards, what they do before and after they go into battle and in their off-hours," reveals Liefeld. "[Being in Youngblood] is a 9-to-5 job for them. There are different shifts for different people. They've got super-villains and menaces that they fight, but the theme that runs throughout the whole book and the characterization that takes place will be in reference to how they're treated and who they are in society."

In addition to offering a flip cover, every issue features a 12-page story for each team, with both groups intertwining more closely by the third issue. Liefeld fans will be disappointed to learn, however, that the third issue is also the series' last.

"It's all I could fit in right now," he explains, "but I wanted to get this out there. They're characters I like a lot, and there are themes in it that haven't necessarily been explored. It's not a Justice League America/Justice League Europe-type thing. They sign on for terms—five years, two years, three years. They're contracted to perform for the government. Some of them have been manufactured for the U.S. government; others haven't. There's not a mutant in the bunch, but by the last issue, we'll be introduced to the first 'mutants' that come out of



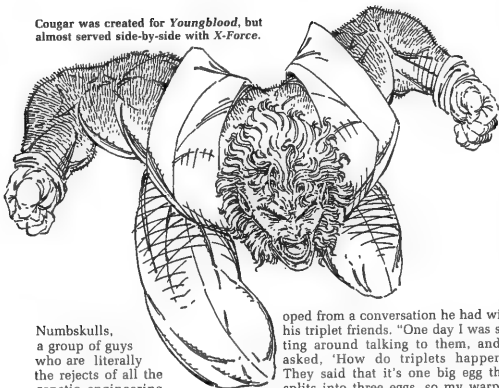
Sentinel is "Mr. Youngblood," says the plotter/artist, while Brahma is "the ultimate Rob Liefeld character."

the closet in the Youngblood universe, and that's a team called Genesix. This mini-series is an introduction to what both of these teams are about."

Of course, there are also other countries which are jumping on the super-powered bandwagon. "You'll see that Israel, Russia and China are putting up their own super-people," Liefeld says. "For example, there's Masada, who is Israel's first and only hero to date.

"Then, we're also introducing the

Cougar was created for *Youngblood*, but almost served side-by-side with *X-Force*.



Numbskulls, a group of guys who are literally the rejects of all the genetic engineering that's going on; they didn't quite turn out the way they were supposed to. This is crazy, but this is how I get my ideas. My dad had a brain tumor when I was in sixth grade, and it reoccurred twice since then. Thank God he has lived through each one, but when I was a kid, I remember that the entire half of his face was numb, and he has never had feeling in that side since. I also remember that I used to pinch his cheek and he couldn't feel anything, and I would just crack up. My brain then started going: 'What if there was a whole bunch of these guys, and these little third-world countries sent them on the frontlines of a war? They can get blown to bits—bullet holes rip through them; these guys are getting killed. They just can't feel it, so they'll just keep moving straight towards their goal.'

Although the public considers Youngblood to be heroes, some of the group's members can hardly be thought of as role models. One such member is Psi-fire, whom Liefeld calls "a serial killer. The government paroled him because he's what I call a triple-kinetic—a pyrokinetic, a telepath and a telekinetic. They put psychic dampeners on him and shut down his telepathic skills, but they want to abuse his pyrokinetic and telekinetic abilities for their own purposes. He's part of the away team, so he's not on U.S. soil all the time to be abused by the press. But this guy's pretty loony, and he's much more powerful than the government realizes. They're taking a risk by letting him walk around in the first place."

The plotter/artist's idea for another away team member, Brahma, devel-

oped from a conversation he had with his triplet friends. "One day I was sitting around talking to them, and I asked, 'How do triplets happen?' They said that it's one big egg that splits into three eggs, so my warped mind goes: 'OK, what if that egg never split? Would this giant person come out?' So, Brahma is a triplet cell that never split. He killed his mom during childbirth because he's so damn big."

"Brahma—whose real name is Jeff—is in an extremely dysfunctional family," he adds. "His brother suffers from muscular dystrophy, and his father blames him for his mother's death. As he grows older, he excels in sports, especially football—he is the line of scrimmage. So, the NFL pursues him and says, 'Hey, we'll take him right out of high school,' but the government steps in and says, 'No, we want this kid. We're willing to match the NFL's price, and then some.' So, his father tells him, 'We're going with the government for a better deal.' Because of his guilt [from his father], Jeff signs on with the Youngblood program, but he doesn't get to do what he always wanted to do. He's not in it for himself; he's in it for a bunch of other reasons, and we'll deal with their psychological ramifications."

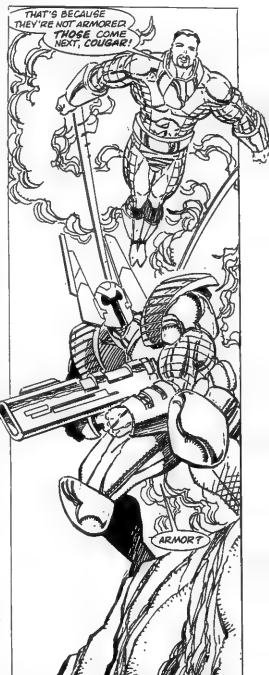
"In every way and proportion, Brahma is incredibly large. I figure that he's the ultimate Rob Liefeld character, because everyone says that I draw big, wide people with little pin heads," he laughs. "So, here's the big, wide, pinheaded character."

Also reluctant to be on Youngblood's away team is Riptide. "She can take any moisture that's in the air and create tidal waves or mass geysers. She can draw the sweat off someone's brow or the dampness in a room and just accelerate it. It's a mystically-based ability, and she's a pretty powerful member of the group. As for her personality, she's not so much into the team. She's pretty

much a loner who's looking to get out of it as soon as her contract ends."

"Then, there's Sentinel, and he's actually the very first Youngblood member," Liefeld continues. "He was a scientist/inventor who was part of the whole Youngblood movement, and he was contracted to create a bunch of exoskeletons that could be used by the military at wartime. But when he developed the exoskeleton, he made it so that it could be honed only by him. [With the suit,] he has amplified strength, speed, the power of flight and some energy discharge power. He starts thinking, 'This is cool, so why am I selling this to the government?' So, he went in there and said, 'Look, I'll continue to make exoskeletons for you, but I want to use this one.'"

"Sentinel actually touched off the whole movement that got other people



Within the Youngblood universe, Liefeld can "set and break the rules" with his characters. "It's your own playground."

thinking, 'Hey, we could create an elite squad around him.' But he was the very first one; he's the Mr. America, the Mr. Fight-for-my-country. He's the symbol of liberty among all these guys. Call him 'Mr. Youngblood'—if the whole thing crumbles, he'll still be there, because he believes in the project."

Liefeld credits the 1982 film version of *Cat People* in helping him create Cougar. "I always thought [*Cat People*] was the coolest concept, so Cougar is actually strung off of that idea, where there's a race of these cat people living in the jungles of Africa. These people are lycanthropes, except they're not werewolves; they're like cat-wolves."

"To make a long story short, Cougar's mother was found unconscious by an expedition and taken into their care. She mated with one of them, and the result was Cougar. He went back with her to the States, since he was an outcast for being more human than cat. Since he's a product of a highly-unknown alien civilization that lives on Earth, we'll have later storylines in which he and his mother do their darndest to keep this race hidden. They know that any government that discovers them will exploit them. So, up to this point, little is known about Cougar to the rest of the world, or the team."

Liefeld is quick to point out that Cougar is not another Wolverine ("He acts more regal and royal than brutal and savage"), but he does admit that Cougar's creation has some strong ties with another X-character. "I was going to introduce Cougar in *X-Force*," he reveals. "He's one of the old 1985 Megaton Youngblood team. When I started working on *The New Mutants*, [editor] Bob Harras wanted to get rid of a bunch of characters and put some new ones in. Cougar was one I had proposed, but I wasn't real happy with the way Cable [another Liefeld creation] was being used; at that time, I didn't have as much say-so in the plots. So, I did a cover with [Cougar] that we canned, because I was real unhappy with the way Cable was coming out. I just said, 'Bob, I'm not going to use Cougar anymore.'"

"When *X-Force* came about, I wanted to create a Morlock character for that team. Feral was actually an ex-Youngblood member; it was going to be revealed that she would later follow Cougar to the States. But instead, I said, 'I'll make her a different character and throw her in *X-Force*.'"

Two more aliens serving the Youngblood cause are Combat and Photon, but Liefeld will quickly pose the question as to which one is staying on Earth illegally. "You always hear about the government covering



Readers can expect a lot of Combat in *Youngblood*.

up alien discoveries; well, this is a case where they did," he says. "There was this alien craft carrying two warring factions that crash-landed on Earth. The government has limited knowledge on both of them, since both aliens are still learning English. They're kept on separate teams: As we open, Combat is on the away team and Photon, the home team, but they'll switch. They don't keep them on the same team; that would be like putting an Israeli and an Iraqi together in the same boat. They would kill each other."

"The government wasn't—and can't be—sure that one of these aliens was a prisoner on the ship while the other was the pilot. When the ship



Shaft, Youngblood's latest home-team leader, isn't happy about his new job.

crash-landed, things were in such disarray that they weren't quite sure who was who. Combat told them, 'Look, I'm a wanted man, and so is he. We will trade you technology for refuge here on this planet.' So, they're thrown into the Youngblood project and forced onto the team. The government said, 'Anyone on these teams who doesn't like it can stuff it, because these aliens are giving us valuable information, and you are part of their protection. They'll function to serve you, but at the same time, you'll protect them if an alien ship appears one day and asks for them back. That's part of the deal.' So, there's all sorts of friction going on."

Liefeld describes the Youngblood home team as "an excellent marksman with bows, arrows, crossbows—he's real adept with weapons. He was originally an FBI agent, but they just snagged him out of there and told him, 'Look, we need you. Here's who you're going to be. Here's your code-name. This is your new job and this is how you function.' He didn't have anything to say about it. Although he's a natural to lead the team, it's the last thing he wanted to do. He was happier just being in his suit and tie, not fighting crime in spandex."

"When we open the first issue, we find out that Shaft is about a week into that job," he adds. "The previous guy who held it—a guy named Battlestone—was tired of the government's bullshit. He left and formed a group called Brigade. The government isn't very happy about it, and we find that out in the mini-series."

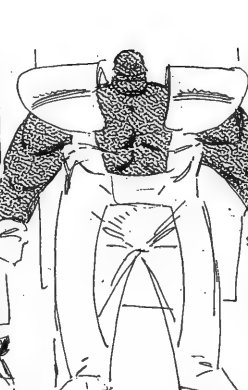
Readers will find out more about Battlestone and Brigade in their own



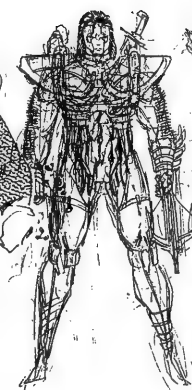
Diehard: The group's mysterious Superman-type.



Vogue: A Russian agent striking a pose in her new country.



Bedrock: A tragic figure—not.



Prophet: Spreading the word according to *Youngblood*.

four-issue stint, which kicks off after *Youngblood* concludes. "I created the characters for that mini-series, and I'll be co-plotting and inking it," states Liefeld. "Hank Kanalz will script the book, and Marat Mychaels will be co-plotting and drawing it. And it's either in *Youngblood* or *Brigade*—I can't give away who—but one of the characters is a *National Enquirer*-type reporter who has infiltrated the team and been given technologically-manipulated super-powers. She's not who she claims to be, and she's writing an exposé on the group."

A handful of mystery men and women are also included in the *Youngblood* membership. Among them is Diehard, "the government's 'extra-soldier'-type experiment," says Liefeld. "He's the government's first and foremost genetic experiment gone good. They gave him the serum, the drugs and the technology to be this ultimate soldier. He's incredibly strong and strorg-willed; he has increased abilities all around. He's the closest thing to a Superman that the book has, but there's also a mysteriousness to him. You'll see him take off his mask and stuff, and we'll follow him home a couple of times, but as to who and what he is, it's going to be left up to the reader's imagination."

Liefeld moves onto Chapel, then pauses. "I don't want to give a whole lot away about Chapel," he says. "If we have a dark, brooding character in *Youngblood*, it's him. He has no super-powers; he's a former soldier-of-fortune/mercenary. He had been working for the government in different capacities for years, and was very

effective in assassinating little third-world dictators. So, they said, 'Come work for us,' and he said, 'OK. If the price is right, I'm there.'"

"Then, there's Vogue, a Russian agent who just defected to the U.S. because she liked it here better. She's also very dark and mysterious. The Russians want her back in a very bad way, and they'll put things in motion very early on to get her back."

Filling out the home team is Bedrock, a character Liefeld thinks is "pretty cool. Bedrock is this 16-year-old kid named Billy, whose life has been the pits ever since he was a little kid. He was the kind of kid who had absolutely nothing going for him. His father works for a corporation called G.A.T.E. [Genetic And Technological Engineering] Enterprises, which happens to be a *major* menace in the *Youngblood* universe. On his way home from school every day, Billy would visit his dad and see what experiments he was working on. Essentially, the best way to explain Bedrock is that you have characters like the Hulk, the Fantastic Four and others throughout the history of comics who have been victims of horrible accidents. Billy did this accident to himself, however, to change his rotten life. He was a grade-A loser. He went in [his father's lab], drank the serum and the end result created this eight-foot, granite figure."

"And Billy *digs* it," Liefeld notes. "He's not a tragic figure. He can lift cars and throw them for blocks. If he steps too hard on the ground, he'll cause about a 6.5 seismic reaction. He has a lot of power at his fingertips,

but he's very immature, and his parents are on his case. His parents were the only people who were ever really cool and understanding with him, but they were pretty shocked that he did this to himself. Now, he's this granite super-agent who gets paid big bucks for being in *Youngblood*, has a lot of power and gets off on it. The public has no idea that within that shell is a 16-year-old kid."

Writer Marv Wolfman (in CS #24) reported that Liefeld had been talking to DC Comics about doing a possible *Titans* mini-series. Negotiations have since fallen through, however, and Liefeld offers both his side of the story and its relationship to *Youngblood*.

"I love controversy," he laughs. "My favorite characters as a kid were the X-Men and the Teen Titans. I work in the X-Men office now, but I don't work on the X-Men. *The New Mutants* was my way of doing my own version of the X-Men, and *X-Force* is kind of that now."

"At the time, I was looking to do another project. *Youngblood* was already being talked about with Malibu and Dave Olbrich, but I really wanted to do something with the Titans. I always loved that series, and it was like, 'Wow, if I could do the Titans and the X-Men at the same time, I could die a happy man.'"

"[My idea] was something called *Team Titans* or *Titans Force*, whatever. It was just me, at this point, pursuing a fan boy's dream, and I was really into it. I talked to the

(continued on page 66)

HEROIC IDEALS

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Even though he's wrapping up his 18-issue run on *Animal Man*, Tom Veitch still says he's overworked.

Of course, the problem may be that he's adding more titles to his workload. In addition to the new *Star Wars* mini-series for Dark Horse (see STARLOG #175), Veitch's projects for DC include the two current mini-series *Clash* and *My Name is Chaos*, proposals for two different horror books and a revival of Jack Kirby's *Kamandi*.

So, Veitch says he won't be too disappointed when his *Animal Man* tenure concludes with issue #50, even though it's one of today's most acclaimed comics.

"I agreed to write *Animal Man* for a limited time, mostly as an experiment to see what it would be like to



Art: Brian Bolland

Tom Veitch keeps experimenting with becoming super-human.

do a monthly book," he explains. "I'm essentially writing one continuous story that runs 18 issues."

The first 26 issues of *Animal Man*, written by Grant Morrison, also stand on their own as one long story; Veitch says he's doing the same thing. "It revolves around characters. I created Stone, this shaman character, and I

wanted to delve as far as I could go into whatever he represents. Instead of creating some shaman from Central Casting, I wanted a guy with depth to see how far into him I could go—and, by that process, plug into *Animal Man* himself. At the same time, I'm also re-doing the entire origin—the whole story that Grant established is kaput!

"Grant's story was about the crisis of identity between the character and

Uncomfortable with his life and job, Veitch sees Buddy Baker in himself.



Photo: Martha Veitch/Courtesy: Tom Veitch

Current *Animal Man* writer Tom Veitch is reworking the hero's origins, since Grant Morrison's previous stint on the series was "impossible to follow."



All *Animal Man* Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1991, 1992 DC Comics Inc.

Art: Steve Dillan/Colors: Tulliana Wood



Clash: Art: Adam Kubert

Clash: Copyright 1991 Thomas Veitch & Adam Kubert

Clash is similar to Veitch's *The Nazz*, "but taken in a different direction."

his writer or creator. Mine is about a crisis of identity between the character and God. Whereas Grant was God in his series, God in my series is a natural force, expressed by the shaman," says Veitch.

"By the way, I'm putting myself in the series, too. It's a tradition, right?" he laughs, referring to the final issues of Morrison's run. "I'm gonna get myself in a couple of issues, just as a side character."

In contrast to the events set up by Morrison, Buddy Baker no longer remembers that he's a comic book character. "Grant left us with a horrible quandary when he left—how do you deal with what he has done? I decided to shunt it all aside. He completed it, he capped it, it was over. Grant told me that he tried to set it up so that it would be impossible to follow, and he pretty well succeeded! That's one reason we're re-doing the origin."

"My approach to *Animal Man* has to do with my identification with the character," Veitch explains. "I'm a family man, so I can speak from experience. The whole business of this guy who's a costumed superhero—he has a function, a role in life, a public kind of job, but he's not happy with that. It's not something he's comfortable with, and that's the way I feel about my life and job. I don't understand why we have to put on these suits and go out there and do this particular thing for money. I would much rather be hanging out in the mountains. And, I've projected that attitude onto the character; I write him from that point-of-view."

Veitch says he didn't like *Animal Man* when it was revived initially, with a few exceptions like issue #5's "The Coyote Gospel."

"In general, it didn't excite me," he says. "One of the things that made me want to do *Animal Man* was that I didn't think that he had been done right! The characterizations weren't real."

Economics is the reason Veitch cites for his departure from *Animal Man*, as his schedule is increasingly busy. "I'm going to be writing *Star Wars* up the kazoo. I can't do both things. My mind won't let me. If I split myself between those two things, both of them will suffer. To do *Star Wars* right, I have to immerse myself in it, and that's what I plan to do."

Before he leaves the book, however, Veitch's plans for *Animal Man* include the return of the Penalizer, a parody of Marvel's Punisher.

"We're establishing this comic book company that publishes these comics. The editor of *Penalizer* is a total gun freak. He looks like an

overweight Penalizer, and he's projecting an idealized form of himself as this comic character.

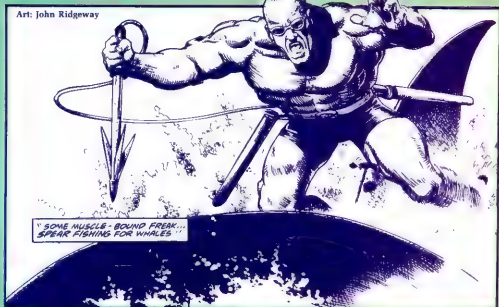
"Buddy's wife Ellen goes to New York—they're on the East Coast now—and gets a job as a colorist on the *Penalizer* comic book. We find out that the editor is a closet vigilante who's out to kill drug dealers.

"We want to get into an anti-gun storyline. We're thinking of doing a series about Penalizer which would be essentially a good story with an anti-gun message, and have this character learn a lesson about how his gun comics may be putting a mythology into our culture that results in these horrible things happening."

Another storyline involves "ravis, Buddy's scientist/'60s burn-out friend, going to work for a renegade division of STAR Labs that's up to no good. It'll be resolved in issue #50.

"Buddy will be getting more involved with the shaman people, which is what I wanted to do from the beginning," Veitch says. "I want to take this guy into some really heavy philosophical stuff—stuff you would never see in a comic book—and see if I can get away with it! Much of it comes out of my reading, particularly about American Indians, and a new book called *Black Elk*, written by a modern-day descendant of the original Black Elk. The book opened my eyes tremendously, and I would like to feed some of that into the comic."

Veitch is a strong believer in animal rights, and agrees that he's exam-



Veitch thinks *My Name is Chaos* makes for a whale of a mini-series.

ining some rather strong issues in *Animal Man*. "I wanted to do a story about animal-rights activists who break into and trash labs, but I won't have time."

He had also planned the *Animal Man* annual, which he also probably won't have time to do now. "I was going to have Buddy sell the film rights to his life story. He's a stuntman on an *Animal Man* movie. They hire this Hollywood stud to play him. I was going to do a thing on how the other stuntmen all resent him, because he doesn't have to worry about getting hurt, while they're risking their lives."

Another major sub-plot featuring Buddy's daughter and her powers will also be resolved by Veitch.

"We're gonna try to resolve it so that someone else can carry it on," he explains. "It turns out that there are five apprentices of Stone: Buddy, Vixen, this guy who used to be Bwana Beast named Maxwell, Buddy's daughter Maxine, and a woman whom we're going to be meeting. We'll also meet two characters at the same level as, or maybe even higher, than Stone. The three of them get together and reveal stuff that has been going on for millions of years, which is coming to a climax in issue #50!"

Veitch praises Steve Dillon's interior art on the title, as well as Brian Bolland's covers to every issue.

"I like the humanity of Steve's work," the writer says. "It's not this overblown muscle-book look that's in most comics. More and more, everything in comics is getting to be pumped-up bodies and sex—it's out of control. I abhor that whole thing, and I like Steve because he agrees with me on that."

"Brian Bolland's covers—wow!" Veitch whistles. "He works very slowly on the covers. He showed me in London that he had been working three entire days just pencilling *one* cover! Just amazing, meticulous attention to detail."

Aside from *Animal Man*, Veitch has been keeping busy with several mini-series, including last year's *The Nazz*. He was happy with the final result, though he does have some mixed feelings.

"I had kids telling me how much they loved this character after the

Whether Buddy likes it or not, Veitch is directing the hero into the vicinity of the shaman people.

Art: Steve Dillon/Covers: Tatjana Wood





Art: Adam Kubert/Dave Browne

first, and even the second issue. Then, we turned him bad, and fat, and they said 'Ugh, how could you do this?!' They were hating me. I never thought that would happen. I was just doing what I wanted to do, and the reactions we got were completely unexpected.

"Also, the series is told from four different points-of-view, and if there was a mistake, it was in having to publish them in four separate issues. I'm not sure if it works," he says. "Somebody told me, 'You turned him into Elvis!'"

Veitch was "super-happy" with the just completed *Clash* mini-series, with art by Adam Kubert. "I'm trying to experiment with these creator-owned projects and find something new in the idea of the superhero that connects with my vision of how people are constructed psychologically. The superhero is an adolescent, fruitless fantasy with no basis in reality. Kids need to learn that we're in a whole process of changing and transformation, and I want superheroes who are plugged into this transformation process.

"Clash uncovers a way of becoming super-human, and completely misuses and exploits it. It's a similar idea to *The Nazz*, but taken in a

different direction," Veitch says, noting that there's a possibility of a *Clash* sequel.

"We don't kill him off," Veitch says. "We set it up for him being stripped of everything, except for a core of power, and essentially wandering Earth to have a whole new kind of experience. I would actually like to do a monthly *Clash*."

Veitch's newest mini-series, the four-issue *My Name Is Chaos*, also deals with mysticism and superheroes.

"I think I have a few ideas, and I'm trying to work them around and around until I get them out," he laughs. "Or else they have layers, like an onion—each one of these comic series is like a layer in an onion, and I'm peeling them off!"

"Chaos takes place on a cosmic scale. We imagine that the universe is created by these beings created by God, and given the role of creating the universe. These multiple beings also enter their creation, essentially sending out probes of themselves to view it from the inside. These probe entities exist on Earth, Mars, Venus and everywhere. Their chief manifestation on Earth is whales—this is Earth in 2050. These beings bring through this

The writer would like to have *Clash* wandering around Earth monthly.

one guy, Thomas Valis, and make him like them to prevent the ultimate collapse of order.

"Thomas is easy-going and humble," Veitch says, "but his arrogant brother is involved in this corporation called Mars Prime, and they're involved with terra-forming Mars. His job is to create scientifically-altered human beings who can exist on Mars. There's a conflict between the two brothers, and Earth starts to break up as well, so the terra-forming must be accelerated.

"The awakening of our hero, Thomas Valis, is connected to the discovery of these entities on Mars, and the mystical ties that connect them.

"It's an interesting book for me to write. I read it over and think, 'This book is weird! I wonder if they'll get it!' There are certain things you can do in novels, but when you do them in comics, you wonder if the audience will be able to go with you."

Veitch is also reviving Jack Kirby's *Kamandi* as a six-issue mini-series under DC's Elseworlds imprint, with art by newcomer Frank Gomez.

"We're rebuilding the whole thing from scratch," he says, "but using much of the same spirit from the original book. The style won't be connected to Kirby—it'll be more of a hardcore future. We're going to play down the talking animals—this is my chance to do an ass-kicking post-apocalyptic book!"

One of DC's continuities had *Kamandi* growing up to be Tommy Tomorrow, but Veitch is disregarding that development. "They're actually fine-tuning their continuity and making rules," he says. "So, in order to allow these bizarre comics choices, this will be an Elseworlds comic.

"Superman is in it—he's 150 years old," Veitch explains. "He's depressed, though, because he wasn't able to stop the second apocalypse. In our book, there were two apocalypses. After the first, they created this master computer to try to govern society and bring everything into balance and harmony, but the computer went berserk and created the second apocalypse. Superman couldn't stop it, so civilization's wiped out, except for those people living in the bunkers and certain sub-human elements in the ruins."

Kirby's original featured different species of talking, anthropomorphic animals that had taken over the human roles. Most of that is gone.

"Before the second apocalypse," Veitch notes, "there was genetic research into animals—this is something I got from an actual news arti-

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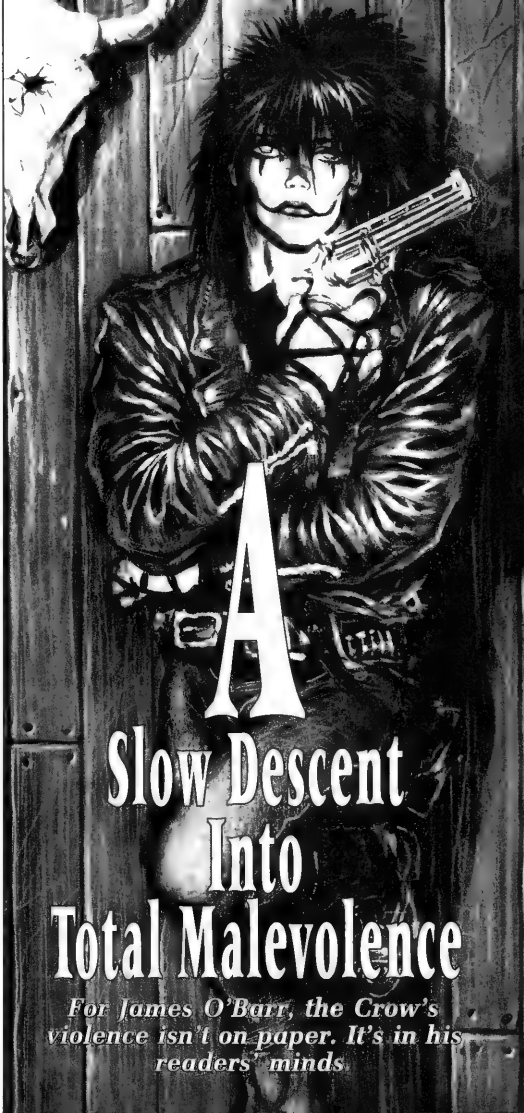
By ANYA MARTIN

Back in 1981, James O'Barr sketched out the first 48 pages of a black-and-white comic featuring a trench-coated, pale-faced, black-haired specter and a mysterious talking crow. His face painted like a harlequin death rocker, Eric was a man who was dead but yet walked and wrought his revenge on Fun Boy and his gang—the drug-dealing sleaze who raped and murdered his fiancée Shelly before Eric's dying eyes. Seething with a gritty ghetto street reality tempered by haunting, passionate flashbacks, *The Crow* was dedicated by O'Barr—a man most often seen in a black-leather jacket—to the memory of Ian Curtis, lead singer of the industrial rock band, Joy Division.

The Crow wasn't released until 1989 by Caliber Press, but rocketed immediately to cult success. Its dark, poetic and violent imagery attracted not just comics fans, but also members of the so-called "alternative music" scene. A first printing of issue #1, O'Barr estimates, sells for up to \$65 today, if it can be found. Even third printings of the other three issues are rare. But the most frustrating thing for *Crow* fans has been the two-year delay between issues #4 and #5—Eric's final confrontation with the killers.

Now the wait is over. On the comics front, Tundra Publishing is re-releasing the rare first four issues compacted into two double-length, high-quality editions with fully painted original color cover art. The third volume features the long-anticipated 64-page conclusion to *The Crow*. Volume One, compiling *Pain & Fear*, was scheduled for January publication, with advance orders approaching 20,000 copies, high numbers for an independent release and especially for a reprint. Volume Two, *Irony & Despair*, is due in March, with the final installment, *Death*, out in May.

Indeed, 1992 could be the Year of the Crow. A film script is currently in pre-production for New Line Cinema with an anticipated late 1992/early '93 release. While Italian horror film maestro Dario Argento and Sam Raimi both had expressed interest, innovative young video director Alex Proyece will helm the movie, with Edward (Platoon) Pressman as producer. Christian Slater and rocker



A Slow Descent Into Total Malevolence

For James O'Barr, the Crow's violence isn't on paper. It's in his readers' minds

Charley Sexton lead the actors talked about to play Eric.

Or 1992 could be simply the Year of James O'Barr, a self-avowed outsider defying comics' conventions to provide a raw, hard-edged alternative. Also appearing in comic shops in January from Tundra is a new genre-splintering anthology called *Bone Saw*. It's edited by O'Barr and his frequent collaborator John (Ashes) Bergin and packed with a psychotic brew of twisted black humor, short stories and art. *Bone Saw* includes O'Barr's crazed pencils and inks on "Slave Cylinder," written by Jeff Holland and colored by Carolyn Bergin, which O'Barr describes as a far cry from *The Crow* despite its big, black-haired protagonist. It's a "32-page parody with a cyberpunk/Gothic theme" of Warner Bros. cartoon-hero Road Runner.

While a chance to illustrate an adaptation of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* fell through, O'Barr has created his own thriller, *Chinese Bones*, his first full-color book, due out as a six-issue, bi-monthly series debuting in August. Finally, he's drawing some short stories for *Hard Looks*, a Dark Horse Comics collection writer of crime writer Andrew Vachss adaptations—"dark and nihilistic slices of life; Vachss is Raymond Chandler with a bad attitude."

All Crow Characters © Art: Copyright 1988, 1992 James O'Barr



All Crow Art: James O'Barr/Courtesy Tundra & Caliber Press

According to O'Barr, the delay with *The Crow's* conclusion was partly due to his desire to tie up loose ends while still maintaining the story's integrity. "Towards the book's end, there's a shoot-out in which about 30 people die," he offers. "I really needed to temper that with enough flashback sequences so readers wouldn't lose their empathy for the character. The violence is done very tastefully, very cinematically, but the body count is enormous."

Indeed, despite the revenge theme, keeping the violence subtle is a major concern for O'Barr. Separating his character clearly from other modern takes on the superhero—such as Frank Miller's *Dark Knight* or Alan Moore's *Watchmen*—he claims that Eric's persona is motivated by the personal tragedy of Shelly's brutal murder. The seeming superhero-like title, *The Crow*, referred originally to the bird, not to Eric's secret identity.

"I wouldn't call Eric heroic. He's certainly not cast from the 'good vs. evil' polarity that permeates most vigilante revenge characters," says O'Barr. "Friedrich Nietzsche said, 'Where love is concerned, there are no borders between good and evil,' and I think that's the key theme of *The Crow*. *The Crow* is not a crimefighter *per se* like Batman. His whole being is woven around the idea that his is a love so strong and powerful that even death couldn't stop him from righting such a horrific crime. Eric isn't out there to clean up the streets or solve the drug problem. He simply wants a few individuals and whomever else happens to be in the room."

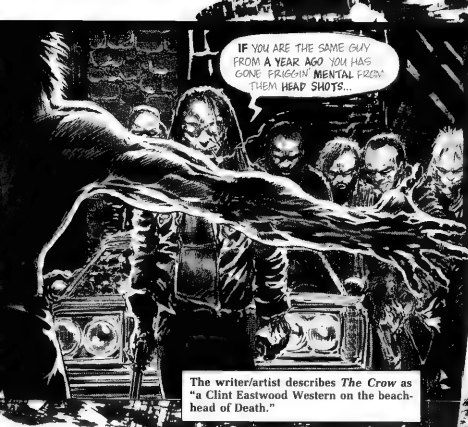
With this theme in mind, tempering the violence became very

The alternative rock scene is O'Barr's main influence for *The Crow*.

Photo: Courtesy Tundra



Writer/artist James O'Barr isn't quick to call *The Crow* a "heroic" figure.



It'll take Eric and Shelly's brutal deaths to make *The Crow* fly.

important to O'Barr. Thus, Eric's confrontations with Shelly's murderers, and his passionate, philosophical repartee with his victims, are matched by memories of playful love that bring his pain to life. Eric's humanity is also emphasized by the bond that forms between him and Sherri, a blonde little girl, daughter of a junkie mother, stuck in the ghetto.

"Eric is very cold and nonchalant about killing these people," he continues. "Thus, I'm very careful when I draw these scenes to treat them with the utmost respect and maturity. I don't do gratuitous violence. If you look closely, about 70% of the violence is implied or in shadow. I suppose the fact that people see *The Crow* as an extremely violent book means that I've done a good job, because the real violence is in their heads as opposed to being on paper."

To achieve just the right balance, O'Barr meticulously redrew as many as 50 of the final 64 pages, negotiations between Caliber and Tundra buying him the time to fine-tune the book. "*The Crow* is without a doubt the most violent, omnivorous, tough and soul-emptying thing I've ever done. It literally gets darker and darker as the book progresses—like a slow descent into total malevolence. The violence is ferocious, and the melancholy scenes are almost unbearable. I guarantee no one will be disappointed by the final book; a bit sad, because it ends, but it was always intended to end this way."

This concern carries over to the movie. O'Barr's main fear had been that it would "degenerate into a *Death*

Wish-type film." An original script was penned by cyberpunk author John Shirley, with the final draft by David (Leatherface: *Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*) Schow. As for Proye as director, O'Barr is pleased: "He has a really slick style—lots of fast cuts and harsh lighting."

All of this seems a long way from *The Crow*'s humble beginnings and a teenage boy who wanted to draw and write comics. At age 15, he met underground-comics founding-father Vaughn Bodé at a local comics con. While seemingly an unlikely mentor—given the difference between the two's artistic styles—Bodé's praise cemented O'Barr's desire into a real, tangible reality.

"Vaughn's enthusiasm for my sorry little comic strips forever changed me," O'Barr remembers. "He was a major influence on me choosing comics as a career and, if you squint hard, you can see it in my work. You can see his influence in particular in the use of sound effects as part of the art, not as an intrusion."

The following year, however, O'Barr met Dave Cockrum, who was at the time riding high with *The Uncanny X-Men*. Cockrum offered the young artist an opposite review.

"I showed him my portfolio, and he flat-out told me I had no talent, I

was wasting my time, and that I should take up truck-driving. Now, that would have probably devastated me had I not met Vaughn Bodé a year before. So instead of packing it in, I took the attitude of 'I'll show that @#!'."

By the year's end, O'Barr had sold strips to *Heavy Metal*, *Gasm* and 12 small-press fanzines. His advice, therefore to budding cartoonists: "If anyone out there is told they're wasting their time by some hotshot pro, tell them where to get off and what to do when they get there. Don't ever, ever quit. You're bound to get better if you draw every day."

Fueled by his own life in the seedier side of Detroit and a personal tragedy, O'Barr started *The Crow* while wrapping up a three-year stint in the Marines, stationed in West Berlin. He then mailed out photocopies of those first 48 pages to every comic publisher in the business back in the early '80s. The only company that showed any interest was Aircel, who wanted him to extract the "moody, gloomy scenes and add more violence," he recalls. "It was obvious that they had missed the entire point of the series, and I declined the offer. I knew there was an audience out there who could identify with the book's



Eric isn't out to clean up the streets, O'Barr reveals. "He simply wants a few individuals and whomever else happens to be in the room."

The Crow's power of "sin without guilt" enables the character to go "beyond crime and illness," O'Barr notes.

pain and the angst. The idea of twisting the character into a *Punisher* clone was unthinkable. So, I put it on the shelf, where it lay for 10 years."

Meanwhile, O'Barr worked as an auto mechanic and financed his way through three years of medical school by painting jackets and T-shirts, mostly with images of Marvel and DC superheroes, for a comic shop owned by future Caliber publisher Gary Reed. Hanging out at the store, he met Vincent (*Dead World*) Locke and Guy (*Baker Street*) Davis (CS #13). One day, he showed them a dusty copy of *The Crow*. Upon seeing the book, Reed suggested starting a comics company to publish the works of these three talents. O'Barr recalls. Soon after, Caliber Press was born, with *The Crow* #1 selling in the range of 30,000 copies—huge sales for an independent.

The phenomenon was cemented by *The Crow*'s appeal to the alternative rock scene. "They weren't looking for a comic," O'Barr says. "They were at a record store, and they found the comic there."

Indeed, O'Barr intends Eric to resemble a cross between Peter Murphy, the lead-singer of seminal

British Goth band Bauhaus, and American rocker Iggy Pop. "Iggy is where all the neo-ballet sequences in *The Crow* come from," he reveals.

A veteran of some 15 live Iggy gigs over the past decade, O'Barr himself readily admits that his style is far more influenced by music than by previous comics art. "I have been undeniably influenced by other artists—the splash page in *The Crow* #1 is a homage to Will Eisner; if you look to the left of Eric, 'Eisner Glass' is painted on a building window," O'Barr admits. "But my main influences have been music. Music works like a drug on me. I can literally be brought to tears by some songs. Joy Division and Ian Curtis were the main catalysts for *The Crow*. Ian Curtis' lyrics had a profound effect on me, like two lost souls trying to touch each other through glass."

Indeed, *The Crow* is sprinkled with lyrics from Joy Division songs. Among other musical inspirations, he's quick to add a list of bands that would make most people's ears melt, like American Music Club ("they sound like Joy Division from Nebraska with the batteries turned down really low"), Jim Carroll, early Cure and Trust Obey, the apocalyptic industrial band fronted by *Ashes*' writer/artist John Bergin. O'Barr's best friend, Bergin and O'Barr have collaborated

on numerous Trust Obey tracks—ranging, according to O'Barr, "from ethereal soundtracks to garbage-truck crashes"—and including a riveting soundtrack for *The Crow* that is anything but ethereal.

A year-and-a-half ago, O'Barr received a fan letter from Bergin praising *The Crow*. The chemistry was immediate: "Neil Gaiman said that John and I were like the twin doctors in *Dead Ringers*, because it looked like we were having conversations without saying a word to each other," O'Barr jokes, recalling Gaiman's reaction upon meeting the two at the San Diego Comic Con. "There's a definite energy exchange between us. However, our approach to comics reflects opposing polarities. I prefer the 'hit them with a hammer' ideal, while John is much more subtle. It may be weeks after reading one of his stories that you discover the scars that he has left on your psyche."

O'Barr immediately cites *From Inside*, Bergin's upcoming six-issue series from Tundra, which he describes as "absolutely devastating."

Their first major joint effort to see print is the *Bone Saw* anthology. Both O'Barr and Bergin had received comics shorts among their fan mail, some of which they felt were quite polished and professional. "We thought it would be a great idea to anthologize this work so these unknown

(continued on page 52)

WARPED IMAGINATION

By STAN NICHOLLS

Making the unbelievable believable is John Bolton's specialty.

John Bolton got into comics to maximize his work's diversity. "When I was at art college, there was a slide show one day, and the presenter projected comic illustrations on a 12-foot screen," he remembers. "A bit like Roy Lichtenstein blowing up a frame; they suddenly became art. That slide show kindled my interest."

"In those days, the '70s, comics weren't something you considered pursuing as a career in England. There was no real industry here, and I had no intention of upping stumps and moving to the States. So, I was interested in comics, but there weren't any outlets."

On leaving college, he found one or two comic strip magazines had surfaced, and he adapted TV and film-oriented subjects like *Planet of the Apes* for them. "But it was only playing at it, really," Bolton says. "I think the longest comic run I did at that time was 15 pages."

"Then, in 1981, an interview I gave containing some of my work was seen by an editor at Marvel. This editor rang from the States and asked if I wanted to work for Marvel. That was my first call from America, and when we finished talking, I jumped up and down for five minutes. I couldn't believe somebody had actually spent that much money calling me!"

That original commission was to adapt one of Robert E. Howard's *King Kull* stories. "Marvel had a book called *Bizarre Adventures*, which had a different theme each issue, and they commissioned a 56-page black-and-white strip from me. I found that really scary and panicked for a week. I wasn't in awe of the company, the people or even the material; I was in awe of taking on 56 pages when I had never done that many before. But once I got started, it was fine."

Bolton's influences in those formative years were more environmental than personal. "I'm influenced by everybody and everything. My surroundings influence me. I could be sitting here about to draw something and look out the window at the way the wind is blowing the leaves into a certain formation, and that may conjure up some sort of demon, or

whatever. So, it's not names specifically. I'm influenced by my emotions more than anything else. My emotions are what I'm doing. That's why I change my style so much. Because I change so much."

Looking at his work since that first strip for Marvel, Bolton regards his output in terms of his emotional involvement. "You tend to only look back at the work you like. The stuff I enjoyed doing is always superior to the stuff I've taken on for the money, which I guess is inevitable. I still put the same amount of effort into every job, but what happens is that you're usually interpreting somebody else's idea, so it isn't quite the same as doing something from the soul."

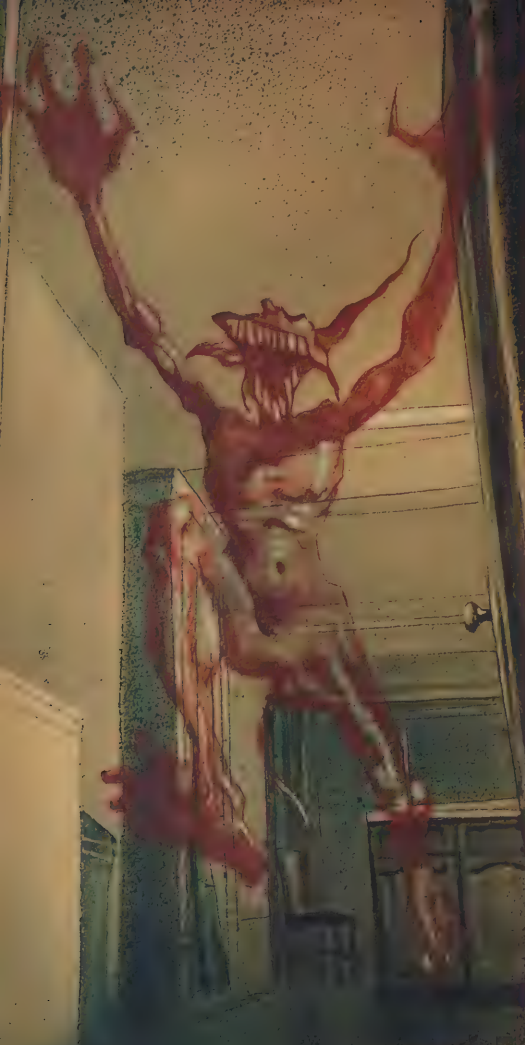
"Someplace *Strange*, which was an idea I had had for years, I'm very proud of. It allowed me to experiment and do things I really wanted to do. But it belongs in the past now and I've moved on with my style since then."

"My adaptation of Clive Barker's 'The Yattering and Jack' is something I'm proud of, too. It has gone exactly the way I wanted it to go, and it has allowed me to experiment at the same time. It's full-color, which I always enjoy because I like painting best of all. Other than that, I don't like looking back too much. Sometimes, stories have a place in time and should stay there. You look at them and think, 'Well, that was right for its day, but it doesn't interest me anymore.' I probably like 'The Yattering' so much because it's something I've just finished."

His collaborations with Barker are proving particularly satisfying. "I've been really lucky with the people I've worked with. We're usually friends first, and the business relationship develops from there, as with Clive. That's always nice, because you feel you're being written for. Well, not in Clive's case because that was something that already existed, and I was lucky enough to have the choice. I knew exactly what the material was before I sat down to do it. I was enthusiastic about his work. I liked his stories."

The first adaptation was of





Artist John Bolton likes working on *Vampire* Barker adaptations such as "The Yattering and Jack" because "we can use that warped imagination."

Barker's "In the Hills, the Cities." "That was quite a scary job too," Bolton reveals. "When you read something for pleasure, you can allow your imagination to run riot. You don't have to work out the minute details, you accept its existence. But when you have to sit down and actually draw the bloody thing, you must analyze whether or not it *can* exist, and because it's so fantastical, you want it to be acceptable as something realistic. To make the fantastic work, it needs to have a firm foundation in realism. So in the case of 'In the Hills,' I had to figure out how this thing would work, how it would function."

Some ideas, he says, spring into his mind fully formed. Others have to be worked on. "Don't forget that often you're reading a script, so you have all the information there. The point is: What makes you choose one line out of 50 pages of material? What makes a particular image jump out?"

"With *Vampire Lestat*, for instance, I was trying to tell a story with the covers. That's why they were all different styles. The editors weren't quite sure how to receive some of those covers. I didn't give them roughs, I just told them either on the phone what I was going to do, or I didn't tell them at all and delivered. What I was doing was trying to capture an abstraction. The character has become a vampire, so how does he see himself? You try to put yourself in his position. If you became a vampire overnight, how would you view yourself? I was picking up on that and trying to illustrate it.

"All the paintings I've done are trying to capture something like that: The essence either of what the book or the character is about. At the same time, you must give it impact. You're selling it to an audience. It has to be commercial."

As a format, Bolton finds the comic medium restricting in another way: "I'm unhappy with the fact that when you're looking at a comic strip, you can see what's going to happen next. The only way you can get around that is to arrange it so the payoff's going to happen on the *next* page. So, there's the build-up over a spread and the last frame on the right-hand page is, 'Oh my God, look at that!' Then, you turn over and there you are. Although that's destroyed when people pick up a comic and flip from the back. So, I have no control.

"Something I've always wanted to do is a book called *Frame by Frame*, a story told entirely in illustrations, and you *have* to turn over. It would have an illustration per page. But I don't know if that's feasible. It would have to be a very long book, and it may be too stilted, although I think I could make it exciting.



Bolton changes his art style so much "because I change so much."

All Yattering & Jack Art: By & Courtesy John Bolton

Bolton's work is characterized by what has been called a "grotesque aestheticism." "Well, how does one conjure up the devil? Or an image?"

"Basically, I want to make the unbelievable believable. I want people to see something which they've never seen before and *believe* it. I want to give people nightmares. I want to give people an image they'll take with them to their graves."

Why? "I don't know if it's for other people; I think it's for me. Because I want to convince myself that I've done something fantastical but made it look as though it could exist. The only thing I can't do is make it move."

"And as far as its effect on readers is concerned, I don't care, to be honest. I'll put that another way: I don't *know* what the effect is, and it can't be a consideration. I mean, sometimes you get feedback, but it tends to be a general thing. On the whole, you don't get any sort of mass reaction to what you do, and you don't know what you've managed to put across anyway. So, you can only do it for yourself. I don't know *why* I do it. It's just that I enjoy the fact that, hopefully, someone somewhere is reacting. But ultimately, it's for me."

"Why the pursuit of horror? It's a really interesting question, and I wish I could come up with an answer. Because it interests me, I suppose. We're back to the idea that if you create something from the soul, then it's going to be that much more believable. You're asking what my motivations are in doing what I do, and it's just pure enjoyment. It's as simple as that. I guess it started by looking at im-

ages which scared me when I was young, like *King Kong*—not that it scared me, but I was blown away by it. Maybe that's what I'm trying to recapture—a feeling, an emotion that has been created within me by looking at something else. I want to try and do the same. I want to play God. Don't we all? That sounds sacrilegious, but it's not meant to. I want to *be* God—and the Devil. That's the problem."

Playing God, however, carries with it a certain amount of responsibility. "Now we're going into censorship. Censorship ultimately ends with the editor. If the editor knows the reaction he's going to get is negative, then he's not going to print it. I try not to censor myself at all. Once I've embarked on something, there's no holding me back. Once I've established the parameters, I'm off and away."

"Have my illustrations influenced somebody to do something they wouldn't have done otherwise? I can't believe that. It's too easy to blame bad behavior on things like comics. Do you think by censoring and sanitizing all adult material that you'll never see another murder? If derangement is there, it will find its way out. I don't believe anyone can be so gullible as to be influenced negatively by what I've produced. I should think people are merely confused by it."

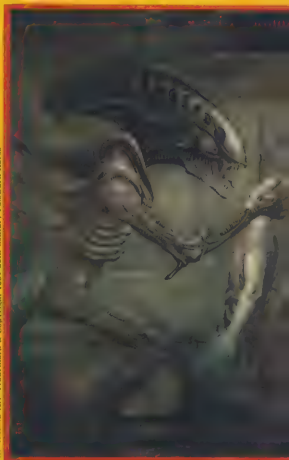
Bolton is uncertain whether the comics medium has fully realized its potential when it comes to horror. "When you look back at the way horror has been drawn, the heyday was EC comics. But maybe that's becoming dated now, and we

can dismiss it. We're moving away from that and going in new directions, and it's right that we should."

"As far as my own work is concerned, it's up to my audience to decide. If they find it convincing, then it has realized its full potential."

"I don't know how popular horror

Art: John Bolton



"I want to give people an image they'll take to their graves," says Bolton.

MUSEUM Art: Trademark & Copyright 1991 2000 Century Fox/Dark Horse



When reading a story script, the illustrator looks for images that "jump out."

will remain. Take fantasy literature as a comparison; we've gotten to the point where there's so much crap out there it's threatening to ruin it for all of us. You can O.D. on it. Godawful films like *Conan* and *Red Sonja* poisoned the water for me to a degree. I preferred fantasy when it was in its infancy, when it was still pure, when people were doing it for the right reasons, like the early Howard stories.

"There's a danger of horror going the same way as fantasy. In fact, I

think it's beginning to do so. Money has come into fantasy and horror; people are doing it for the wrong reasons. They're doing it not because they believe in it, but because they think it's going to *sell*. Those are the wrong motives.

"I don't know how I feel about horror at the moment. I still enjoy horror, but I have to combine something else with it now. There would have to be another reason for me to do it, or continue to do it. *Shame*, for example, is

a combination of both horror and eroticism. The point is that if you believe in what's being presented to you, and you know you can convey that to your audience, then you'll do it. Those are the reasons that motivate me into doing something, not because it may be popular. But perhaps my timing is really off. Here I am doing eroticism when there's a backlash against erotic comics!

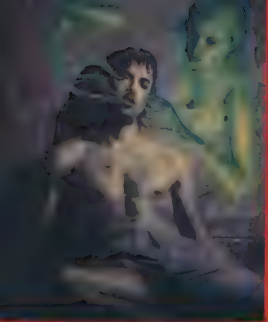
"I work very hard at what I do, and I don't always earn much money at it, because I don't always go for commercial projects; my problem is that I go for things I want to do, and the two things don't necessarily go hand in hand. I should be doing an *X-Men* graphic novel or something, but that doesn't interest me at the moment. And if I *do* do it, it will be because I *want* to. I'm not working for the money. My motives are that pure, that stupid and that simple."

A whole raft of projects Bolton has in the works include collaborations with writer Christopher Fowler, author of a pleasingly offbeat collection of horror shorts, *City Jitters*, and the novels *Roofworld* and *Rune*. "There's a character we both are working on called Menz Insana, and we're going to build a series of strips around him. As his name implies, the guy is totally insane, and we'll do our best to exploit the hell out of him. I really like Chris' work, so we'll be collaborating on several projects together."

There is also the intriguing possibility of working with filmmaker Sam Raimi. "Sam and I met last year



To make the fantastic work, "it needs to have a firm foundation in realism."



Art 36 • "Party Games" 1991, John Bolton. Courtesy: Millennium

Bolton provides the cover (as well as illustrating "Party Games") for Millennium's *Weird Tales Illustrated*, a new horror anthology due out in March.

when he was in London promoting *Darkman*," Bolton explains. "He likes my work and said we should be doing something together. It has all been very vague because he's really busy with his projects and I'm busy with mine, and he's living in California and I'm here in London, so there hasn't been that much chance to get together and discuss exactly what we're going to do.

"At first, we were thinking of adapting *Evil Dead* into a comic strip, which I think is a perfect vehicle for it. But it looks as if it will be *Army of Darkness*, which is *Evil Dead III*. It will probably be two books, which I'll be adapting and painting."

And then there is *Manbat*. "Manbat came about when [DC editor] Karen Berger introduced me to Jamie Delano and suggested we should work together on something. We both liked the character Manbat, so we've gone for that. Batman does make a small appearance.

"I was reluctant to do *Batman*, although I think I could have done him if I had really wanted to. It's not that he doesn't interest me; in fact, he's the only character left over from my early comic reading days that I've always had a hankering to do. But it's difficult to see how one could put a new interpretation on him without a legitimate reason.

"And I need a good story in order to get a handle on the character—this is certainly a good story by Jamie. At least it's not just a continuation of something; it's going to be a new angle and we've got a new character to develop. The way Jamie has developed

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All of Bolton's paintings try to capture "the essence either of what the book or the character is about."



FACE VALUE



All Art: Erik Larsen

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

Erik Larsen believes you can tell a great deal about an artist from his extras.

Pop quiz: He's a misunderstood good guy trying to do what's right. Despite his overwhelming dedication to great responsibility, he finds his every move greeted with ridicule and questioned by a suspicious public. The reluctant hero struggles with sinister skeptics, making ends meet and maintaining some semblance of a normal life. Who is he?

No, he's not Spider-Man. He's illustrator Erik Larsen, who took over Spider when Todd McFarlane left.

Although Larsen had drawn such books as *The Doom Patrol* ("Before Grant Morrison!"), *The Adventures of Superman* and *The Punisher*, nothing prepared him for the intense scrutiny he came under when drawing *Spider-*

Man. "What could I do?" he shrugs. "Todd said to me that I was in a losing position coming onto the book, because I was damned if I do and damned if I don't. If I drew just like Todd, I would get all sorts of mail for being a clone. If I drew nothing like him, I would get hate mail because I had changed the book so much."

"From the editor's point-of-view, I think I came in at a pretty decent time. People were expecting the book to plummet like a stone as soon as he left, so if the book started to sell better, I was a miracle worker. If it sold worse, everybody expected it to sell worse anyway, and they would say, 'It's due to McFarlane's popularity,' and that's fine, too. I came on and the book sold better."

Doing the comic after McFarlane proved to be a tangled web. "There are certain things that Todd changed that had to stay changed after he left it," Larsen states. "He made Spider-Man's eyes big, Sal Buscema made his eyes big in *Spectacular* and Alex Saviuk made his eyes big in *Web*. The webbing coming out of Spider-Man's hands was now chunky, swirly webbing. Mary Jane's haircut was different. I couldn't come onto the book and change everything back. Todd was doing Spider-Man in these angular legs-over-his-head poses. I couldn't come in and say, 'Forget it, all that stuff didn't count, I'm just gonna go back to the way Johnny Romita did it 20 years ago.'"

Still, it must have been difficult to get so much negative mail. "It depends on what it is," Larsen says. "If I can tell they're full of it from the way it's written, then I generally shine it on and try not to worry about it. I know what I'm doing, whose stuff I'm looking and *not* looking at—so when people write me letters saying, 'You're stealing from such and such,' I can just say..." He shakes his head in futility.

"Much of the stuff I've done I've consciously made different from Todd, so that when people look at it and go, 'You draw him just like Todd!' I can say, 'OK, what part? I draw the spider on his chest differently, his eyes differently, I draw the webbing on his arms differently depending on which way he's holding his hands, I do the black on his legs and arms. What's left that's the same?'"

The artist considered his run on the flagship title, *Amazing Spider-Man*, an endurance test. "My goal was to do more issues than Todd," he explains. "My goal was to do it till #354—one issue more than Todd did—but I couldn't! I couldn't last," he admits. "[The time it takes to do] a page varies. I did #349 in eight days. Some take me a full month. It really depends on how enthusiastic for it I am. If I'm writing my own stuff, the artwork goes much faster, because I know exactly what I want."

"I know pages won't come flying back to me with art corrections that need to be done because I wouldn't follow the writer's vision precisely. That was one of the pains of doing stuff for *Amazing*. You can ask Todd why he left; I won't speak for him. Also, he wanted to write. When I started in this business, I wrote my own stuff for a black-and-white comic called *Megaton* and enjoyed it. I've gotten out of that and I miss doing it. I will eventually write, draw and ink my own work. I'm my favorite writer

Photo Lisa Green

Kane's stuff, he's my favorite. I've been at many conventions with Gil Kane and I've never introduced myself, never gone up and talked to him. There's something about somebody whose work you admire," Larsen confesses. "He's the only person in this business I've been intimidated by."

Speaking of intimidating, Larsen



The artist also likes being his own writer. "I never ask me to draw anything I don't know how to draw!"

to work with," he reveals. "because I never ask me to draw anything I don't know how to draw!"

Larsen's entry into comics sounds surprisingly swift. "I started at 19," he recalls. "A couple of friends and I printed up a fanzine on my dad's printing press and I sold 'em through the mail. Some people who wanted to start their own comic-book companies contacted me, so I did some work for them. Soon as you do one thing for one person, you've got something to show the next."

"Eventually, I ran into Jim Shooter [then Editor-in-Chief of Marvel] at a Chicago convention, and he let me do an inventory job on an issue of *Thor*, so then I had some great samples to show people. It has been pretty steady work since. I did the *DNAgents* right after that. I went to work for DC, and did a *Spider-Man* fill-in. I'm 28, and I've been making money doing comics for eight years now."

The artist's creative inspirations are various. "Everybody's an influence," he laughs. "Jack Kirby, Walt Simonson, Steve Ditko. I love Gil

Although he's best-known for his work on the masked Spider-Man, Larsen prefers drawing "characters with faces."

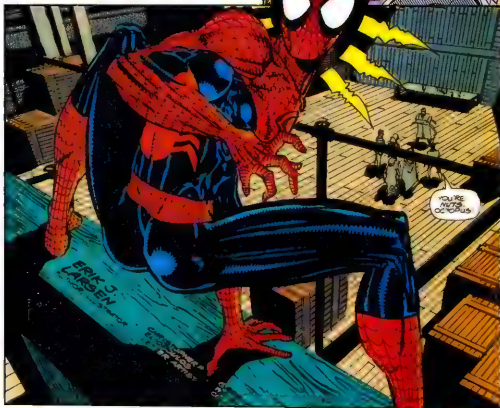
has something brewing with DC's meanest character. "Lobo's a done deal," he happily announces. "I'm doing a Lobo mini-series. Keith Giffen's plotting it and Alan Grant is scripting. He scripted the previous one, and it's gonna be a lot of fun. I prefer writing [what he draws], but in this particular case, I love Keith's stuff, always have, and I really wanted to work with him. It's a dream come true. It'll be a gas."

The artist found doing the rough-and-tumble *Punisher* to be "no fun at all! That was one of the least pleasant things I've done," he admits. "Not that I didn't enjoy the people involved. I've enjoyed much of Mike Baron and Scott Williams' work. It was either some off-issues for Mike or something, but I didn't find it that interesting to draw. I'm not a realistic artist, never have been, and to come on to something and have to do every nut and bolt on every gun wears on me. I would rather make up a big ol' space gun! It did make me stretch, though," he acknowledges. "I will give it that."

Is it hard for Larsen, a Bay Area resident, to draw New York? "I just make it up! It's just a bunch of buildings, isn't it?" he jokes. "There's something about New York. When Steve Ditko drew New York, he lived there and made it up. When Jack Kirby did New York, he lived there and still made it up. I don't live in New York, but I figure I can make it up! I enjoy comics more where people make up stuff than comics where it's overly researched."



Artist Erik Larsen likes drawing characters he's big on, including Spider-Man and the Hulk.



Colors: Gregory A. Wright

During his stint on *Amazing Spider-Man*, Larsen felt he never had "a good handle on drawing Peter Parker."

Like any enthusiastic young illustrator, he has a "dream project." "My ultimate assignment would be to do something with the original Captain Marvel," he enthuses. "My dad was a big comics fan as a kid; he had a lot of comics he has since given to me, and Captain Marvel was a big favorite. I've done all the biggies; the only one I haven't gotten to is Wonder Woman—she's all that's left," he gloats like a big game hunter. "Just her, Cap and the Fantastic Four."

"I've always been big on the Hulk and have always wanted to do him, but *The Incredible Hulk* is such a good comic right now, I'm enjoying it as a fan," declares Larsen. "I found that doing a comic kinda ruins it, 'cause you're sitting there reading it before it comes out, like with *Spider-Man*. You just pick it up to see what the inker did, what did the colorist do,

what did the editor do that screwed everything up? It spoils it! So, I'm enjoying *The Hulk* as a reader and don't want to spoil it. Besides, it has a good artist on it. Dale McKeown's cool."

Says Larsen, "I enjoy drawing characters who don't appear very often, like Flash Thompson. Mary Jane's always fun to draw. I don't think I ever got a good handle on drawing Peter Parker, which is kind of unfortunate, 'cause he's a big part of the book!

"I did one issue of *Hulk* over a Todd McFarlane thumbnail, and that was pretty good. I didn't actually work from the plot, 'cause Todd had done these little thumbnails, and I blew 'em up and turned them into real pencils. On that one, I drew the Hulk with big, fat eyebrows and they took those off of him, and they had Todd redraw his face quite a bit on the cover. At the time, the Hulk wasn't supposed to have eyebrows.

"It's strange, but what looks like a lot of fun usually isn't. I did an 'Excalibur' serial in *Marvel Comics Presents*. I've never read *Excalibur*, never been a fan of it and don't particularly like the characters, some of which were take-offs on classic Warner Bros. characters. It was kinda fun, but I didn't enjoy it because I didn't have any feeling or fondness for those characters. It was just 'eh.' "

Larsen has a penchant for in-jokes and cameo appearances. Flipping through a recent issue, he points some out. "I put my girl friend's last name on this wall ['Wong Imports']; her name's Jenny Wong." He points to a crowded background table in a cafeteria scene. "Here I am, with Dr. Strange, Longshot when he's fat and Elvis eating a donut.

"Something I like to do is carry over characters from other series." He points to several nonchalant-looking passersby. "These three guys were background in *Punisher* stories, and these two people are from *Doom Patrol*. The *Doom Patrol* people make a lot of appearances. Sometimes I'll make up a character for background in a bar scene, and I'll just keep drawing that same character. You get stumped after a while when you have to draw a crowd; you stare at the page and say, 'What do I do now?'

"I have somebody I put in most every comic I do. He's John Day, a good friend of mine, and it's up to the readers to find him. He gets a kick out of it," Larsen explains. "It's the only way I can assure he'll buy all my work. Here he is reading a newspaper. I appear fairly often, usually wearing a striped shirt.

"My editors don't mind," he smiles. "In fact, Jim Salicrup asked me to be a character in *Spider-Man*.



These guys dare you to tell Larsen his Spider-Man looks like Todd McFarlane's.

There's a character called Raymond Trask—that's me. He's Marvel's version of Donald Trump. I'm not doing that well. I can pay the rent, but let's not get carried away!"

Larsen feels there is only one definitive Spider-Man: "Steve Ditko's. Steve did the best version as far as I'm concerned. The testimony to that is there have been several artists who have done the book since who have just swiped from Steve Ditko. When I met Steve, I had just started at Marvel doing *Punisher*, and he happened to be up at the office." Larsen laughs. "It

was a thrill to meet someone who nobody else has met! He's a tall, slender guy with glasses and grey hair. I even inked a Ditko story for *Marvel Comics Presents*."

He has also met Spidey's other dad. "Stan Lee's a fun guy," Larsen notes. "He's full of energy and has the worst memory of any human being on the face of the Earth! He scripted a *Thor* story that Jim Shooter and I had worked out. When I met him, I said, 'Stan, how's it going? You scripted a story I did!' He said, 'Yeah, I kinda remember it...What was the plot?'



YEAH, MAYBE.
OR MAYBE WE
HELPED PUT AN
UNINTELLIGIBLE
INNOCENT MAN,
CAUGHT IN A
MACHINE...TO
HIS DEATH.

EITHER WAY,
I'M NOT TOO
HAPPY ABOUT
IT.

Larsen and Spidey are having a reunion. "Since Todd left *Spider-Man*, I'm writing and drawing a six-part story, and a fill-in issue. I'm doing 'The Revenge of the Sinister Six' [in #18-23] because I thought there were many holes left over from the previous Sinister Six story that I would like to plug. It features Doc Ock and those guys."

One wonders what Larsen has in store for the webhead. "You think I'm gonna bump off Aunt May?" he asks in a Vincent Price voice. "Gosh, I would, but they won't let me! I'll

make Spidey the way he is all the time, but maybe a little funnier than he has been in a while, 'cause I tend to write a funnier Spider-Man than [Amazing writer] David Michelinie.

"The stuff I'm doing with Spider-Man will be much straighter than what I did with him in *Marvel Comics Presents*. It won't be that goofy. It'll be him making funny quips, rather than being silly. I'm not looking to bring much back, I'm looking forward to doing something new; with new characters like Cardiac [the crime-fighting cardi-

ologist]. The Femme Fatales are going to be in an *X-Force* story I'm doing. I'm tired of bringing stuff back and doing characters that have been done a million times before," he admits.

"The main appeal of Spider-Man for me is that he looks cool. I don't think the soap opera stuff is all that interesting. I like the visuals and enjoy all the characters. For example, I didn't enjoy Nathan [Aunt May's sickly boy friend] at all, but then, I can't draw wheelchairs! At least I gave it four wheels. I feel I've done everything I can with Spider-Man visually. I try to make things enjoyable for myself by playing with it, like making Spider-Man's costume red and black for four issues in a row. We got a lot of mail saying they didn't like that!"

He hates one villain even more than Spider-Man does. "Venom is one of the characters I least like drawing," he reveals. "Whenever I do him, I try to bring something new to him. I don't like the character or what he does, so I can't bring much enthusiasm to it. His history is relatively short—every time he appears, he does the same thing. He goes through the same motions every time he shows up. He's a one-beat character; all he wants is revenge, and I find that very boring."

Larsen wasn't happy with his contributions to *Amazing*. "I would offer up ideas, and usually the book didn't turn out as well as I thought, so I stopped offering. The Femme Fatales were completely mine, as was the basis for the Spider-Man story where he wakes up on a desert island. It was my idea to have him wake up on a desert island—I have no idea how he [the writer] was going to set that up or that there'd be a full issue before it.

"What I was complaining to Dave [Michelinie] about was how it was really predictable whenever Venom showed up. There were two issues that led into him showing up, and two issues where he fought Spider-Man. It was the same thing every year, an annual character—he would even show up in the same months! Always the same story! So I said, 'This time, instead of the same lead-up stuff, why don't you just have Spidey fight Doc Ock, and the next issue he wakes up on a desert island?' 'What's going on here?' and Venom could explain to him, I broke out of jail, broke into your apartment, chloroformed you and took you to this desert island! Now, let's have a fight!'"

"Let me spoil some of Dave's plans for you," Larsen jokes. "There was a character who was in jail with Eddie Brock [a.k.a. Venom], and Dave wants to turn him into another Venom—an evil version of Venom, if you can imagine that. He wanted to set up that

(continued on page 58)

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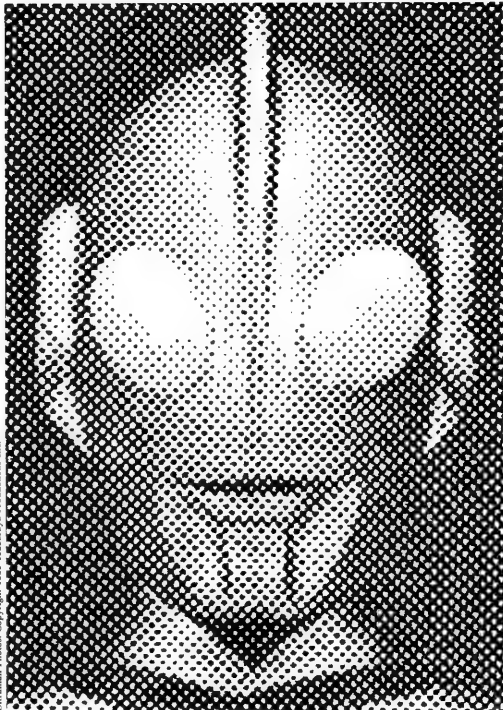
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*Wherever killer alien dinosaurs
from outer space fear to tread,
you'll find*

ULTRAMAN™

By LEE GOLDBERG

Ultraman's expressionless metal face may be new to you, but millions of Japanese see it every day on milk cartons, socks, coffee mugs, pillows, ashtrays, key chains, golf club bags and—among other things—shower heads. And, of course, they see it on their TV screens where, for 25 years, they've delighted

in watching their skyscraper-sized superhero beat the stuffing out of hundreds of alien dinosaurs hellbent on flattening Tokyo.

Now he's back, only this time he's protecting Australia in *Ultraman: Towards the Future*, an all-new, live-action, half-hour series hitting American shores this spring.

It's not the first time Ultraman has stomped around American television. If you're thirtysomething, you may remember watching 39 episodes of the original *Ultraman*, a live-action Japanese series that premiered in the mid-1960s.

Since then, there have been seven live-action series sequels on Japanese TV, nearly 400 episodes of different "Ultra" heroes and cosmic lizards bashing each other with pieces of Tokyo skyline. And that doesn't include the various animated spin-offs, including one called *Ultraman Kids*, a *Tiny Toons* of monster-bashers.

Along the way, Ultraman became a cultural icon in Japan on the order of Superman and Mickey Mouse—and a merchandising bonanza so strong that there is a chain of Ultraman stores in Japan. But in America, Ultraman is virtually unknown.

The original *Ultraman* went something like this: Somewhere in space is Nebula M78, which is populated by the Ultras, a race of mechanical warriors who battle evil monsters all over the universe. They may be great superheroes, but they're lousy pilots.

Ultraman is chasing a monster to Earth when he accidentally collides with a Science Patrol jet, killing its pilot, Hiyata. Since Ultraman took Hiyata's life, he repays him with his own—"metamorphosing" himself into Hiyata and giving him a device called the Beta Capsule. Whenever Tokyo is threatened by some galactic toad or interstellar moose, all Hiyata must do is raise the Beta Capsule and he will become Ultraman, a 60-meter-tall, 58,000-ton, karate-chopping defender of urban real estate.

There is one, small catch. Ultraman gets tired easily, thanks to some quirk in Earth's atmosphere. If the warning light on Ultraman's chest starts to blink, it means he only has a few minutes of energy left. If it ever stops blinking, it means, as the narrator would intone every week, "Ultraman will *never* rise again."

However, the biggest threat Ultraman faced in the early series wasn't that he would "never rise again," but that some clever, giant space lobster would pull the thinly-disguised zipper on his back and reveal the Japanese stuntman inside.

The other live-action sequels, all running longer than the original, featured numerous Ultraheroes and minor variations in the basic concept (see sidebar). Tsuburaya Productions created the other Ultraheroes, according to international sales manager Atsushi Sato, to "keep attention alive so that we could get more popularity." And, presumably, sell more varieties of Ultraman toys.

But so far, the audience, and the buyers of merchandise, have been largely limited to Japan, Southeast Asia, Taiwan, the Philippines and South America. So, Tsuburaya Productions went to Adelaide, South Australia to update and "Westernize" their superhero for a broader, international audience.

"The original series had a kind of nice trashiness to it, trash with a capitol 'T,'" says Gus Howard, supervising producer of *Ultraman: Towards the Future*. "They wanted us to change the aesthetics of *Ultraman*, but not toy with the essential concept. We repackaged their concept."

The Japanese also went "down under" with an armful of storylines, which were passed on to Australian writer Terry Larsen to adapt. Of course, he had never heard of the superhero and "it took me a while to grasp how big a cultural icon he is. I regarded it as kind of a responsibility not to mess with it too much."

"We thought it was all incredibly dumb," says Howard. "We tried to intellectualize things a bit, put more humanity and texture into the human characters, even tried to humanize Ultraman a bit." And, of course, "there were some things that we couldn't change," he says.

Those "things" were the show's rigid format and the essential formula—a monster comes to Earth and knocks down a few buildings... the humans try in vain to stop it... Ultraman shows up, gets clobbered, his chest light starts to blink and then he rips the monster apart.

In the new version, there's still a Japanese hero (Dore Krause), a member of a science patrol who uses a special device—in this case, a pendant—to become Ultraman. Only now, the patrol is multi-ethnic and English-speaking (and headed by Ralph Cotterill, who was a scientist in *Howling III*). And, for the first time, the city getting trashed *isn't* Tokyo.

The other major change is a philosophical one. Ultraman is still a bug-eyed, stony-faced, fin-headed alien who kicks the tar out of space creatures. But he's also a sensitive man of the '90s. "Underneath that Neoprene beats a heart of gold," says Larsen.

In the old series, "Ultraman didn't care at all; he would cut the monsters to pieces, sending javelins into their throats and ripping their limbs off," says Larsen. "Ultraman has had a change of heart. Now, he takes each monster as it comes. Not all of them deserve to be dismembered."

Some monsters are put into hibernation, some are sent packing and some, well, are beaten to a pulp or blasted to bits the good old-fashioned way. "I still have him hitting a few monsters over the head with trains."

The Ultra Series

Unlike Superman, the Ultraman mythos is reinvented with each subsequent series. Here's a quick overview of the live-action Ultraman series and the different variations on the original concept.



Ultraman heads *Towards the Future* this spring in American syndication.

Ultraman (1966-67, 39 episodes).

Ultraman, an alien from the Nebula M78, crashes into a Science Patrol jet, killing Hiyata, the pilot. Ultraman metamorphoses himself into Hiyata and now, whenever monsters threaten to destroy Tokyo, Hiyata becomes Ultraman and beats them up.

Ultraseven (1967-68, 49 episodes).

Ultraseven (Ultraman with lots more chrome) assumes the human form of Dan Moroboshi, a member of the Terrestrial Defense Force, and whenever monsters strike, uses a pair of special sunglasses to transform himself back into a towering superhero.

Return of Ultraman (1971-71, 51 episodes). When two monsters duke it out, engineer Hideki Goh is killed trying to rescue a little boy. So, Ultraman assumes his body and the resurrected Goh joins the Monster Attack Team, investigating unusual occurrences and becoming the superhero whenever galactic reptiles start tossing buildings around.

Ultraman Ace (1972-73, 52 episodes). Ultraman Ace, a boyish Ultrahero with a huge head fin, has a split personality—he is metamorphosed into two humans this time. Seiji Hokuto and Yuko Minami, both Terrestrial Defense Force members killed by monsters. Now, they must both join their Ultrarings to become Ultraman Ace—who battles monsters, often aided by his brothers, Ultraseven and Ultraman, and even his Ultrafather.

Ultraman Taro (1973-74, 53 episodes). Kotaro Higashi is a Space Science Guard pilot who, when his plane is destroyed by a monster, is teleported to the Land of Light in Nebula M78. He's given a special badge by Ultramother (Ultraman with ultrabreasts), which allows him to become Ultraman Taro (Ultraman with antlers) to defend Earth.

Ultraman Leo (1974-75, 51 episodes). Earth is under attack by the Magma aliens, who send one monster after another to demolish Tokyo. Ultraseven is getting his butt kicked when he's saved by Leo, an alien from the Galactic Lion System, which was destroyed by the Magmas. The injured Ultraseven merges with Leo and becomes Ultraman Leo (Ultraman with antlers and more chrome than a '66 Chevy Impala), who assumes the human form of Gen Ohtori, a Monster Attack Crew member.

Ultraman '80 (1980-81, 50 episodes). Ultraman is back, this time sharing the body of a junior high school teacher who moonlights as a reluctant member of the Earth Defense Army—a force that battles monsters inadvertently created by the negative energy of human hatred.

Ultraman-Towards the Future (1990, 13 episodes). Ultraman battles with the evil alien Goudes on Mars, destroying an Earth spaceship in the process. Although he destroys Goudes, bits of the creature shower down on Earth, infecting the planet with evil and creating monsters. So, Ultraman melds with stranded, English-speaking astronaut Jack Shindo, who joins the Australian Universal Multipurpose Agency, battling Goudes-infected monsters before they can flatten Sydney.

—Lee Goldberg



Whether in Japan or Australia, Ultraman has plenty of monsters to contend with.

The new monsters also reflect the program's modernization and Westernization. There's Deganjah, a mythical aborigine monster that travels inside a destructive whirlwind; Barrangas, a creature born from toxic waste; Bios, a mutant monster that's half-computer and half-killer plant; Majaba, an insect mutated by pesticides; and Gerukadon, an evil, flying dinosaur that's a blend of fossil, a pet lizard and supernatural forces.

This latest Ultraman is also much more expensive than the older model. "We tried very hard to avoid the ghastly men-in-rubber suits look, and we weren't entirely successful," Howard admits. "I suppose the biggest problem we had was that they were terribly ambitious about what they wanted to do. They hadn't produced any new Ultraman episodes in a long time. What they wanted from us was *E.T.* production values for *el cheapo* budgets. We had to really change all that expectation, and we cranked budgets up quite a bit." Ultimately, the series ended up costing \$400,000 Australian per episode.

"We think we were horribly compromised by the budget situation," says Howard. "I don't know how satisfied the Japanese were with the results, but it's the best they could get for the money."

One reason the price tag was so high was that Australians aren't well-versed in special FX—and Ultraman is, by nature, an effects-intensive program. "We went down a lot of blind alleys," says Howard. "There is no special FX infrastructure in Australia. We had a huge learning curve. We can do high-quality stuff in front of the camera, but what we have *never* done is process work."

The show mixes some model work, puppetry, video compositing and "really crude computer animation," Howard says. And, of course, lots of guys in monster suits. But the highly detailed buildings that are stomped, blasted, bashed and torched each week are first-rate—in fact, the kind of thing you would expect to find in a big-budget feature like *Total Recall*.

Perhaps this is because the cityscapes came from *Total Recall*. Not the one that was made, but the one that *wasn't*. "When Dino De Laurentiis was going to make the movie in Sydney, they actually went into pre-production and built New York City in 1/50 scale," says Howard. "They had these fabulous streets and buildings, and much of it was still here, packed away. We bought the whole of 'em for a few thousand dollars and blew them up."

The 13 episodes, a way of testing the waters before ordering an envi-

sioned 50 more episodes, were shot in late 1989, and still haven't been widely broadcast outside Japan. The production costs were recouped in home video presales, and Tsuburaya has been taking its time marketing the show in other countries.

Meanwhile, the Australian producers are still trying to figure out the appeal of Ultraman, and wonder if it will catch on when and if it's ever shown in Australia.

"I think the predictability is part of the charm," says Larsen. "What appeals to me is this tribe of aliens who have taken it upon themselves to protect this wayward race of humans."

"The thing that struck me as the best ingredient is the authority figure Ultraman represents," says Howard. "the big-brother strength—almost like Arnold Schwarzenegger."

Even Arnold is more expressive than Ultraman, who has never cracked a smile, winked an eye or even furrowed his brow. In fact, he has *never* had a facial expression of any kind. Ultraman is stoicism taken to an extreme.

Then again, the appeal of Ultraman could be something else altogether, and Tsuburaya's Atsushi Sato probably has the answer:

"It's probably because he beats up monsters and smashes buildings." **CS**

COOL BLUE HEROIC JAZZ

In New Orleans, Shadowman lives for the nighttime.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

The newest hero in the Valiant Comics line is being brought to light—although his co-creator says *Shadowman* is much more comfortable in the dark.

Writing the new title is comics veteran Steve Englehart, who explains that he's proud of the book's improvisational jazz feel.

"Shadowman's a fairly well-known jazz musician in New Orleans, and plays 'cool blue jazz in the dark,' as I said in my plot—a lot of catch words came up in the plot, and 'jazz' is one of them. Jazz is a motif for *Shadowman*, because I kept coming back to jazz as being free-form improvisation in the dark, and that's a lot of what the character is about," says Englehart. "One of the partners in Voyager (which publishes the Valiant Comics line) is a lawyer for rock-and-roll bands, so we're going to have real rock stars show up in the book from time to time, just to add verisimilitude to this guy's world."

"He plays the saxophone in a club called La Bas in New Orleans. He generally dresses in a black turtleneck and black jeans, has a ponytail and lives for the nighttime in the French Quarter. He feels like that's his world."

Englehart is keeping *Shadowman*'s origin as mysterious as the character himself: "One night, he picks up a woman who turns out to be not all that she appears. I can't go into too many details, but he almost dies. Unbeknownst to him at the time, he has picked up a few powers in the process. He has always felt as if he were in control of his life, particularly in the nighttime, and was pleased to be living the life of this bohemian, devil-may-care guy in the French Quarter. When he almost dies, he realizes there's more to the night than he had understood. He finds that he has an aptitude for doing something about it, and so he starts. He's not operating out of revenge for his parents' death, but rather for his own near-death. New worlds are opened up to him, worlds that he doesn't particularly want opened up to normal people, so he decides to put a stop to it."

According to Englehart, artist David (Harbinger) Lapham, who's working on the book with veteran



inker Joe Rubinstein, came up with the character's basic concept, but they worked together with Valiant editors to refine it.

"David Lapham had an idea for doing a 'creature of the night'-type character. I was just starting to work for Valiant, and I said, 'Gee, that's the kind of stuff I like to do!' I sat down with David, Jim Shooter and Laura Hitchcock, and we tossed ideas around. When we were done, we had a character and an origin we were all happy with," says Englehart.

"I haven't been able to write Batman in quite a long time, and I was looking for a character to transpose my Batman desires onto. David was looking for a particular artistic look, and Jim and Laura were looking to make sure it all made sense!"

Although there are some similarities to Batman, Englehart says *Shadowman* is very different in other ways.

"I write both of these guys from whatever creature of the dark is

All Shadowman Interior Art: David Lapham/Joe Rubinstein



Cover Art: David Lapham/Bob Layton/Colors: Janet Jackson



within me," he observes, "and I actually haven't compared them, because they both spring from the same place, from my point-of-view.

"Batman wants to put fear in criminals' hearts; he wants to lurk through the night, whereas Shadowman is more a creature of the night. Although one assumes the Batman prefers to operate in the dark, if he must operate in the daytime, what the hell! There's a very different sense of the world at 3:00 a.m., and it's that nocturnal vibe we're trying to put into this—the idea of somebody who really is a night person. I don't know if Batman is really a night person. He operates in the night, but it's not like that's a particular part of him. Coming back to the free-form improvisation in the dark, it's that sense of you and the fast world which has more sensitivity and depth to it than the daytime."

Shadowman's name belongs to the same motif. "There's a sequence in

Shadowman's bringing mo' better blues to evildoers in the French Quarter.

Writer Steve Englehart is pitting Shadowman against "psychopaths, maniacs and other people you wouldn't want to meet in the shadows."

the first issue where, after battling this maniac, he finds himself in somebody's backyard in the French Quarter. This woman looks out the back and sees him standing there in black in the 3:00 a.m. shadows, and calls him Shadowman. It's nothing more formal than that," Englehart says. "The whole point of the Valiant Universe is to take a realistic approach to this stuff. It feels a lot like early Marvel Comics, when people were creating a universe, and the place wasn't filled with superheroes.

"It's not like the guy says, 'Ah! I shall become a creature of the night and put fear into the hearts of criminals! It's more like he finds that he can do that and wants to do that. Somebody calls him 'Shadowman,' and he says, 'Sounds good to me.'"

Shadowman does have strength and powers beyond those of normal humans. Although Shadowman certainly isn't all-powerful, Englehart is trying to utilize the hero's shadow-like aspects as much as possible.

"He has the strength of three men—I call him 'Captain America class' in the plot. He's stronger than your average bear, but not to the point of hurling cars through windows. In keeping with his name and origin, he's very limber. He's a good fighter, not only because he can take a punch, but because he can avoid a punch. He's almost double-jointed, and it's very hard to lay a hand on him if he doesn't want you to do so. That's gonna translate down the line to: If you tie his hands and feet and look away, he's out of there. He can do a great deal of that kind of stuff—he's as hard to hold as a shadow!

"I'm looking for shadow motifs. Darkness, again, but he seems almost ephemeral to people. He comes and he goes—he's a real person, but he moves so well and so quickly when necessary that it's just hard to hang on to him."

Still, *Shadowman* doesn't resemble Walter Gibson's classic pulp hero, The Shadow.

"He doesn't cloud anybody's mind!" Englehart exclaims. "I was frankly amazed to find that the name 'Shadowman,' which was David Lapham's creation, is a usable name, but it is. I'm trying, even though the Batman is an all-time favorite of mine, not to create an ersatz Batman, and I certainly didn't want to create an ersatz Shadow. But, insofar as they all operate in darkness, they're going to have some of the same



Englehart says Shadowman is "more a creature of the night" than Batman.



Englehart admits similarities between Shadowman and Batman, but you won't catch the Dark Knight playing a sax.

motifs. The thing I think about with The Shadow, in addition to the power to cloud men's minds, is the ability to walk across a room unseen just by stepping from shadow to shadow—that's so specific to him that I don't think we would do that with Shadowman. I'm gonna rule out anything that belongs to someone else, but if it doesn't and it fits Shadowman, then he'll probably use it."

Appropriately, the upcoming storylines in *Shadowman* will be dark and intense, shrouded in shadow.

"We're not gonna have humorous villains who shoot paste and bounce!"





Although *Shadowman* isn't a mystical book, the writer plans on bringing his "Dr. Strange stuff" to the series.

"I can't talk about the schtick I've got going with the villain in the first issue, because it has never been done before, to my knowledge. To give it away would ruin several issues," Englehart explains. "Basically, it will involve the magical dark area of the French Quarter, although he'll be going to other places in his day job—actually, his night job—as a well-known sax man. He'll be called to various places to play on peoples' CDs and get involved with stuff there.

"His basic milieu is New Orleans, specifically the French Quarter, but also the bayou, the swamps, the crumbling mansions and all the evocative stuff from down there. Within that, the criminals he meets will be psychopaths, maniacs and other people you wouldn't want to meet in the shadows. We're not gonna have humorous villains who shoot

paste and bounce!

"Part of the creole New Orleans is the voodoo schtick, and although this isn't necessarily a mystical book, I'm sure I'll be able to pull some of my Dr. Strange stuff into this—it's all darkness, one way or the other!"

The first six issues are plotted out and mostly involve individual stories. "One of the ground rules of the Valiant Universe is that it operates more or less in real time—theoretically a month of real time between issues. I almost feel like I've got the jazz book of clichés, but in plotting the first issue, there were many times when I could have said, 'He does this, next, something else happens.' Instead, I'm trying to write the thing like jazz, where it flows. In some places, it's distinct, in other places, indistinct. We're going more

for the feeling. There are plots with beginnings, middles and ends, but it's not as definitive as some other things I've done. There's a theme running through it all, but not necessarily continued stories."

Although Englehart says *Shadowman* will involve cross-overs with other characters from the Valiant Universe, he isn't gearing the book in that direction. "The Valiant Universe is essentially a creation of Jim Shooter, and he has an idea about the overview. We don't want to have people jumping back and forth between strips. We would like each strip to stand on its own. If all you read was *Shadowman*, you wouldn't be feeling, 'Gosh, I've got to read all these other books or I won't understand what's going on'—not that we don't want you to read all these other books, but it's not like you *must* to understand what's happening in *Shadowman*. On the other hand, they do all live in the same universe, but *Shadowman* is the only one in New Orleans—almost everybody else is in New York."

Shadowman actually appears in *X-O Manowar* #4. Some of *Manowar*'s characters are in New Orleans and decide to listen to jazz at a club. "They drop in and see him playing, and an event takes place having to do with his origin. If you read *Shadowman*, then you'll see the connection, but if you only read *X-O* #4, you won't have to read *Shadowman* to understand. Either one of these books stands on its own—that's something Jim is very adamant about."

Englehart emphasizes that *Shadowman* is a book that *should* be read accompanied by a jazz soundtrack. "The first page of the first issue is him playing jazz in a night club, just studies of a guy standing on a stage by himself with a blue spotlight on him, and all you see are his head, his hands and the saxophone. That splash page sums up everything I'm trying to go for in this—that there is, in effect, a jazz soundtrack. Unlike rock and roll, jazz just noodles along, and if I can give you the right feel in the pacing, you can get the feeling of jazz without hearing anything. That's what we're trying to put across," says Englehart, enthused about the dark superhero riffs he's planning.

"I've never done anything like this before. I've got a lot of this stuff pent up in me, because I wasn't able to put it to use in *Batman* or *Daredevil*," says Steve Englehart. "It springs from something that David Lapham really wanted to do. So, between us, we're trying to do something different, using many things that we both really like. And, if we pull it off, this will be the *one* comic that I'll be the most famous for doing."

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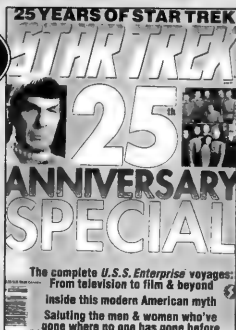
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Bolton

(continued from page 37)

the character has a resonance to it. Manbat's a solid character in his own right. If I was doing it for the wrong reasons—because Batman is a commercial product—that would ultimately come through in my work."

Gas masks have been popping up in Bolton's work with increasing frequency. Whether gas masks will feature in *Manbat* or any of these other projects is an open question. "Ah yes, gas masks," Bolton sighs. "This is something that seems to have been developing on a subliminal level for a few years now."

"When I'm left to my own devices to come up with an illustration, the characters *always* seem to end up wearing a gas mask. Gas masks work on more than one level; they not only disguise the character, they are also quite menacing. They have a kind of realistic horror."

"Any other kind of mask is just a mask. A gas mask represents death, in a sense. I don't know where I'm going to take this. But I did suggest to Steve Niles [of *Arcane*] that, once I have all these illustrations strung together, we should collect them in a book called *Mask Arcade*. It would have a story written around each illustration of someone wearing a gas mask and, rather like going into an arcade where you're presented with a number of different machines to play, you would have all these gas mask motifs with accompanying text to play with. I can't say more about that at the moment because Steve and I still have to work out the details."

"This all started when I was asked to paint a self-portrait and I couldn't be bothered to paint myself in a sort of dumb, boring stance, just looking at the reader. So, I stuck on a gas mask. What I've always tried to do in my work is combine reality and surrealism. I really enjoy it. I get a kick out of doing that. And I think when you see somebody dressed perfectly normally wearing a gas mask, it's bizarre."

What frightens John Bolton? "Very little. I think a long illness would frighten me. If you're talking more on a fantastic level, then nothing frightens me at all."

"I'm not scared of death particularly; when it happens, it happens. I hope to die over either a plate of seafood or a painting. And you have to die in the middle of what you're doing, having not finished it; you should drop the brush with paint on it so it falls on the original."

"Actually, I think I would like to be in the middle of a cover for Clive Barker when I drop dead." **C**

Crow

(continued from page 32)

talents could get some wider recognition. We assembled the most disturbing, maniacal cross-section of fiction and art. The book represents a miasma of genre-circling works. No two stories are alike."

A memory of an experience O'Barr had at medical school provided the title and, according to O'Barr, sums up the book: "One day, I was describing to John about when we had to view an autopsy. It was an in-joke for the interns performing the autopsy to see how many students they could make ill (which numbered quite a few) by sloppily cutting apart this old man's cadaver. They let chunks of flesh and organs flop to the floor, and then they threw random tissue hunks at each other. It was all very childish."

"John asked me if this made me queasy. I said, no, that it was, in essence, just meat. What did bother me was the bone saw. It looked like a little Black & Decker circular hand-held saw. The sound of that blade as it cut into the skull was a very high-pitched whine and the bone chips were flying everywhere. That really got to me. That gave me *chills*."

Back on his own and doing comics and artwork full-time, O'Barr is hard at work on *Chinese Bones*. Again, the title has a disturbing significance: "Chinese Bones are the Asian equivalent of Russian roulette, with the exception being that finger bones with notches in them are rolled to determine the number of bullets that go in the gun."

However, if music proved the inspiration for *The Crow*, *Chinese Bones*—while its main characters physically display a raw, punk "leather jacket" angst—seems as much rooted in O'Barr's favorite movies. O'Barr is as avid a collector of *Blade Runner* memorabilia as of Joy Division.

"*Chinese Bones* is a car crash between *The Wizard of Oz* and *Blade Runner*. It looks a bit like Simon Bisley meets Daniel Brereton. The story has five central characters, which in essence means it's five times more violent and depressing than *The Crow*. Like *The Crow*, it gets more volatile and claustrophobic as the story progresses. It's a very black storyline with explosive violence and a visually stunning panorama of color."

"Let's just say I know my dark side intimately; as [friend and cyberpunk author] William Gibson says, 'James earned his wings as a violence pilot.'"

Returning to *The Crow*, O'Barr sums up his own theory behind the



According to O'Barr, *The Crow's* progressively dark tone is "like a slow descent into total malevolence."

book's appeal and his own intentions, using the same eloquence and poetic/action-film drama that seethes through all his work: "At its best, *The Crow* has the weight of a nightmare, a kind of maniacal levity, like a Clint Eastwood Western on the beachhead of Death. It's centered around an unrelenting apocalyptic vision in which all values topple. All hell breaks loose and death's circle dances in upon itself in a wicked celebration. He may be a hero's shadow, in that being heroic requires the capacity and the decision to be evil. Clearly, the Crow character goes beyond crime and illness, beyond pathology to a deeply buried unconscious power; the enigmatic power of 'sin without guilt.'"

"I understand that darkness is a real substance, not just an absence of light, but implicit in light. A substance that must be extracted from light and submitted to transformation. *The Crow* is a history of a life written in erasure. This raid on Death's dream kingdom is what appeals to the readers, and those readers are the disenfranchised souls who see no future, have had their spiritual goals crushed by 'normal' society."

James O'Barr describes these "disenfranchised" as "those kids with mohawks and blue hair and 12 earrings, that sea of black leather, who are washing down the gutters of our society," and aligns himself firmly with them, pushing the boundaries rather than placidly accepting society's limits. Like these kids and Eric, he agrees with rocker Bruce Cockburn: "The trouble with normal is that it only gets worse." **C**



Linda Woolverton brings the beauty of the written word to animation's timeless tale of unlikely love.

I've been involved in writing for kids my whole life," says *Beauty & the Beast* screenwriter Linda Woolverton. "I had a theater company. I have a master's degree in theater for children. I've written two young adult novels and I've written a lot of Saturday morning [cartoons]. I had always wanted to write a Disney movie, and I was arrogant enough to think I could do it."

In 1987, the thirtysomething author sent Disney her second young adult novel, *The Running Before the Wind* (described by Woolverton as "a hard-hitting, issue-oriented teen book about child abuse"), in hopes of securing work. Little did she how much work would be forthcoming.

Impressed with the book, Charles Fink, a Disney development exec, then offered Woolverton the opportunity to write a Winnie the Pooh feature. Though that script was never produced, it served as a "great writing sample" for the Los Angeles-based

scribe, eventually landing her a dream assignment: Penning the screenplay for the studio's 30th animated feature, *Beauty & the Beast*, then planned as a straight dramatic adaptation of the classic fable.

By KYLE
COUNTS

Writer of the Beast

"At the time, they had a script [by original directors William and Jill Purdom] that they weren't happy with," explains the henna-haired, befreckled Woolverton. "While it was true to the fairy tale, it was very dramatic, very dark. When I got involved, I did things with the characters, like making the Beast struggle more with the monster within him. And I made Belle a strong female role."

Woolverton spent a year on a first draft before the film's direction changed. "Once *The Little Mermaid* came out, and was such a huge suc-

cess, [Little Mermaid songwriters] Howard Ashman and Alan Menken got involved and the decision was made to add songs and music."

Her initial version contained enchanted household objects, she says, but they "didn't talk, so they had less personality than the ones we ended up with. With Howard on board, he insisted that those guys sing and dance. Howard influenced the bringing about

of [the Beast's servants] Lumiere, Cogsworth and Mrs. Potts—the concept of singing and dancing objects."

Woolverton flew to New York to work with lyricist Ashman, who was then, unbeknownst to her, gravely ill with AIDS. They spent a month restructuring the story so that "the songs were really incorporated into the fabric of the piece and weren't just plunked in. Howard had very strong opinions about the story. What happened was, we ended up just throwing the old version out and starting from scratch."

Upon her return to California, Woolverton would write pages—"up to where the song went in"—and fax them to Ashman. He, in turn, would position the songs (written concurrently with the script) and create transitional dialogue for each tune's intro. Rewrites were done following long-distance phone conversations. "It was an incredible collaboration," recalls Woolverton. "Howard made me grow as an artist and a writer in remarkable ways. I did all the writing, but there's a lot of Howard Ashman in the story."

Contrasting the two versions is easy for Woolverton. "There's much more entertainment value in the final version. There's a lighter tone. We made a better movie the second time around—I wrote a better script, with Howard helping me. He taught me to push the emotion of every scene, to find its emotional center and put it across."

Sometimes, Woolverton's dialogue found its way into the songs themselves. Such was the case with "Belle," the film's opener, a Broadway-style number that introduces the story's dreamy-eyed heroine. "Howard just told me to go ahead and write the scene without music. I sent him the pages, and he incorporated my lines into the lyric. What I got back was some dialogue, a lot of singing, and then his own stuff in the middle of all that. It was an interesting way to work."

Writing the "book" for *Beauty & the Beast* was a learning experience for Woolverton. "What I discovered about writing a musical is that what you can do in a song, you *can't* get away with in dialogue," Woolverton reveals. "You can't just have somebody stand there and then do a monologue about



Writer Linda Woolverton is pleased that Belle comes off as "a strong-willed, smart, independent, intelligent girl" in *Beauty & the Beast*.

the way they feel, because the audience won't buy it. But with a song you can get away with it—you can get away with Belle running out the door and singing about the 'great wide somewhere.' In writing the script, I learned how

much the songs can enhance the writing. I didn't feel confined [by the musical format]; I felt *challenged* more than anything else."

Unlike the role traditionally played by live-action screenwriters, Woolverton was "on set" throughout the film's production. "The process is: The storyboard people take a scene and put it on storyboards. Then, you see whether the written scene works or not. We all sit around and look at it and say, 'This doesn't work and this does.' Maybe a scene would be too wordy, and the

Glen Keane's animation of the Beast "made you really care about him."





Being a creative part of *Beauty & the Beast* is its own reward for Woolverton.

artists could draw it better so that you could look at it and get what you needed to get, rather than have a lot of extra dialogue. I'm learning, certainly, to write less dialogue. It's better to show it than say it."

If the consensus was that a scene needed a polish, Woolverton would boot up her PC for the necessary revision. "The rewrites happen there, on the boards," she continues. "I would run back to my computer and rewrite stuff and run back again. It was a very humbling experience. I must have rewritten every single scene in the movie 15 times."

Such a process meant checking her ego at the door each day. Woolverton admits. "More than anything else, I learned in writing *Beauty & the Beast* that it's *not* about my ego. It's not about whether Linda thinks her line is better than somebody else's; it has got to be what's best for the picture—no matter whose idea it is. I can't give you a percentage, but the vast majority of the words that you hear in the movie are mine."

Did she watch other classic Disney features for inspiration? "Certainly, I grew up on Disney movies," Woolverton explains. "I put on *Cinderella*, but all it did was intimidate me, so I had to stop. I also avoided Jean Cocteau's version of *Beauty & the Beast*, which I had seen in college. I had to put blinders on and say, 'I can't think about [comparisons]. I just have to do my job

so that we can make the best movie we can make.'"

In terms of official studio guidance, when the project was still a nonmusical, "Jeffrey [Katzenberg] would read my drafts and give me notes. But as far as what I could and could not do, Disney didn't dictate that much. I wanted to do my take on *Beauty & the Beast*, and that's what I did."

"I looked at the original fairy tale, I decided what I thought was important to keep and what to change. My drafts were written without being told what to do by anybody. I think they were smart to let me have a go at it without many preconceived dictates."

Fashioning the final draft meant emphasizing the story's entertainment value. "My original, non-musical version was much more charming than entertaining," she says. "I tried to make it lighter, to find humor in it—there just isn't any humor in the fairy tale. Also, in the fairy tale, Belle goes to the castle and just sits around and has dinner with the Beast, for days on end, which is pretty boring, dramatically speaking. I added the enchanted objects in the castle and the part about her trying to escape and being set upon by wolves, and the Beast rescuing her, which is the emotional turning point of the whole movie. That's when she realizes that he's not out to kill her."

The wolf attack sequence brings up the question about its appropriateness for younger viewers. "On the boards, it was even more intense," Woolverton remembers. "I think they pulled it back a little bit, and I'm glad that they did. As far as its appropriate-

ness, well...it is a drama, and the wolves are starving...I haven't seen the sequence with little kids. I hope they don't run screaming up and down the aisles. But I can't worry about that. We try and make these movies for family audiences, from ages three to 80. You try to do your best to appeal to everyone. Dramatically, that was the way to make it work best."

Seeing the film's final version was an "overwhelming" experience for Woolverton. "I saw it last weekend [at Disney's Florida animation facility] for the first time all the way through, completely animated. Remember, this is my *first* movie—I spent four years of my life on it. It was an incredible, emotional experience seeing it, knowing that I had been a part of it. It took on a life of its own away from me—it didn't need me any more. I didn't have to worry about it anymore; I didn't have to think, 'Oh, God, that scene isn't exactly right.' It was like a child you've sent out there in the world: It'll either walk or won't walk without you."

She took great pleasure in watching the film's characters come to life. "Certainly, the actors took the characters beyond what I could do on the page. I felt really, really gratified about Belle's character. I felt that she came off as a strong-willed, smart, independent, intelligent girl. As a role model for girls, I'm really pleased about that. Ariel [in *The Little Mermaid*] is really interesting because she's a mermaid. Belle had to be interesting on her own merits. She was a human; she didn't have hair that floated."



The writer dramatically enhanced Disney's version of the classic fairy tale by adding Belle's escape from the castle and rescue by the Beast.

As for the Beast, "I think that what Glen [Keane] did, animation-wise, made you really care about him. You could see all the conflicting emotions. The scene where he yells at her in the lair, where she comes to see the rose...the way Glen animated the Beast, you can see his realization that he has done the wrong thing, and his self-recrimination—all this in an animated character. I don't think that has been done before. We really moved animation forward a little step by doing that."

On the performance level, Woolverton heaps special praise on David Ogden Stiers, who narrated the film's prologue and voiced Cogsworth. "David just blew us away. Talk about an intelligent man. In the audition, he looked at a drawing of Cogsworth and said to us, 'Now, how much space is between the character's nose and upper lip? Because that will resonate differently in his head, and the sound will be different than if there was much less space.' We just looked at him like, 'What???' We didn't know what to say."

Woolverton generously credits the

former *M*A*S*H* co-star with ad-libbing one of the movie's funniest lines, heard in the scene where Cogsworth tries to counsel the Beast on matters of love. When the Beast asks what he can do as a gesture to Belle, the fussy little clock replies: "Well, there are the usual things: Flowers, chocolates, promises you don't intend to keep."

"He improvised that. It gets a huge laugh at every screening. He would sort of go off. He took the character

length," she offers. "If not for time limitations, we might have developed the love relationship between Belle and the Beast a little more."

Also trimmed were scenes with the Beast and his magic mirror ("He didn't show her the mirror for a long time, because he was still selfish") and sequences detailing Belle's attempts to teach her imposing suitor how to read. "The problem that kept coming up was, you can't teach someone to read

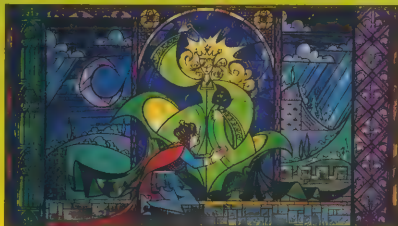
that fast. He just could not have learned to read that well, that quickly. It was really getting in our way. So, we had to sacrifice it."

Working with first-time directors Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise (CS #23) was, in a word, "wonderful. They're very funny guys, just delightful. They recorded the scratch [temporary] voices themselves. So now, every time that I see

Cogsworth, I know it's David's voice, but I see Gary.

"We all had so much passion for the project, from the beginning. Everyone who worked on this project was so passionate about it that sometimes that passion flared." Woolverton sidesteps

(continued on page 66)



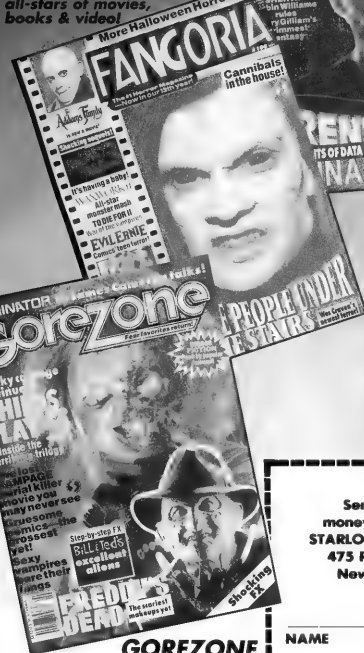
and made it so much better."

Due to the film's compact running time, pieces of Woolverton's script never made it past the storyboard stage. But the screenwriter is philosophical about such cuts, citing the astronomical per-minute cost of animation. "We were always fighting

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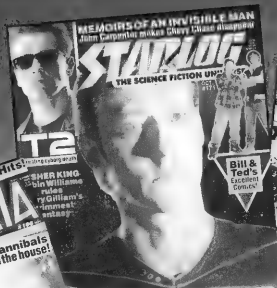
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Cage

(continued from page 11)

devoted to it. This is a character who hasn't been seen before. Characters change, so I'm basing this character on what has gone before. It's a new character, a new Luke Cage, a new attitude based on the old attitude."

Cage is trying to avoid personal entanglements in his professional life, but will probably be getting romantically involved with a newspaper editor—if they can overcome their initial dislike for each other.

Since Cage is one of the very few black characters with his own title, McLaurin says they will be delving into black-oriented storylines.

"Before his series started, Cage guest-starred in *The Punisher*, and we had Cage talking about black-on-black violence," he says. "I'll be trying to do a different take on some of the stereotypes that you see in comics, where, if you need a mugger, you have a black guy harassing people. We want to do something like *Boyz n the Hood*, where we're talking about black-on-black violence and the cultural effect of it, as well as stereotypes enforced on other blacks. That's detrimental to people in general—if people are perceived in a certain way, they'll act in a certain way. If people are shown that there's another path, maybe they'll take that other path."

"In the second issue of *Cage*, we'll be having a rapper, the original angry young black rapper, who's promoting a controversial message. Cage will be hired to protect him from threats, and will encounter a band called The Hammer, who are related to 'The Right' from *X-Factor*. Instead of symbolic mechanical machines against mutants as a racial theme, it'll be mechanical supremacists against this rapper. We're getting a strong reactionary flow in this country which is setting civil rights back a little bit at a time, and people don't perceive that; at the same time, there's a growing militancy in the black community, and a growing self-worth, which is really positive."

"For the most part, Cage is a strong character who is black, not just a strong black character. His race affects who he is, and that will come through, but it's not just because of his race—it's how he grew up."

"There's a lot of blending in what I want to do. Every story I do is going to have a message in it, not just a message in the story, but a message with this character—specific things no one has ever known before," says Marc McLaurin, excited about the opportunities he sees uncaged before him with this new series. "We'll even see Cage as a kid!"



Nova's ready to soar again in his own mini-series, with Larsen as his navigator.

Larsen

(continued from page 42)

story, and use my desert island idea to give me a token, 'Here-I'm-listening-to-you-a-little-bit.' He had his own agenda."

"I enjoy characters with faces," Larsen declares with a smile, "which is kind of the unfortunate thing about being on Spider-Man—you don't get to draw a lot of faces!"

The artist's next project should impress a cowardly, suspicious lot: "I'm gonna do a three-part *Legends of the Dark Knight*. Since everybody is doing their own version of Batman that's nothing like the others, I'll be doing the same. Mine won't have any lips! Killer Croc is the bad guy, and he and Batman will be kicking the crap out of each other! It's completely new and I'm writing, drawing and inking it. It'll focus on Croc, who was established years ago before the *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, and I want to re-establish him as a bad mof!"

He's also firing up plans for *The Man Called Nova*. "I mostly read Marvel as a kid, and as far as Marvel goes, I started late. My first *Spider-Man* was #152. I didn't really get on the ground floor of anything, except for *Nova*. I enjoyed *Nova* as a kid, and *Nova* was something I always wanted to work on, but not necessarily draw. Now, I get to draw and write him, so it's fun. He'll no longer be called 'Kid Nova.' I'll be doing a *Nova* series or mini-series, depending on if it stinks or if it's wonderful."

Veitch

(continued from page 28)

cle. They believe they can alter the genes in dogs to give them vocal chords, so we start with a lemur that has vocal chords given to it and is learning how to speak. We're trying to set it up in a logical, scientific way."

After he completes the *Star Wars* and *Kamandi* mini-series, Veitch says he's working on two projects with artist Kelly Jones, though both are in very early stages.

"We're talking to [editor] Karen Berger at DC about doing a horror book on human monstrosities. We're also working on a series called *Umbra*. It's our serious, psychological horror thing, which will be 12 issues minimum and may become a continuing book for DC. We're going to try to go further into the directions started by Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman and see if we can live up to what those guys have done. And there are no superheroes in it."

His primary goal as a writer is to educate young people. "They get out of school and run down to the comic-book store. Comics are what they really like, what they learn things from. The comic industry as a whole isn't aware of their responsibility in this area. I'm not saying there's a need for the socially conscious, heavy-handed things we've seen from time to time."

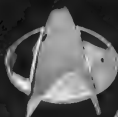
"I'm talking about basic attitudes toward life, basic teaching, advice about what it means to be a human being. Comics are putting out a lot of bad teaching in that area. What we're getting from stuff like *X-Men*, to me, is teaching kids the wrong things. The thing I hate the most is the *Punisher*-type stuff that glorifies guns and killing."

"The whole idea of making the killing of another human being into a macho event is the kind of stuff that posesses are feeding on in the inner city. They're probably getting it from films more than comics, but comics are definitely part of it. I'm not saying you can't have action and killing in comics. Look at *Star Wars* when they blow up the Death Star—there are probably 200,000 guys on it! But, there's a different sensibility."

"There's a certain progression going on in comics, and only certain comics are part of that progression—the rest of the stuff is just re-hashing what has been done before. *Sandman* is part of that progression about 60 percent of the time," he says. "And certain artists are part of it, taking a certain risk."

And Tom Veitch—overworked or not—plans to be a part of that progress.

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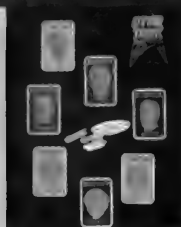
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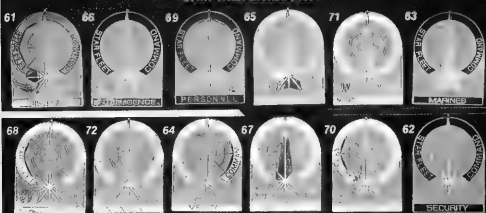
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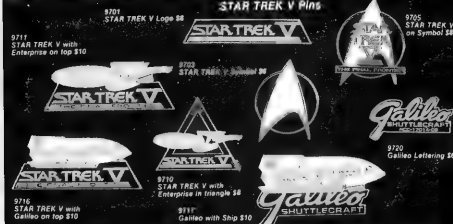
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CANINE STORY

He's really sweet, very innocent & distinctively animated. Why not pet "The Family Dog"?



By KYLE COUNTS

My only problem with the press is that they always quote me accurately," jokes Dennis Klein, writer and co-executive producer—along with Tim Burton and Steven Spielberg—of CBS' new animated primetime series (produced by Amblin Television in association with Warner Bros. Television and Universal Television), *Family Dog*.

That's Klein's sly way of saying that he's a writer, not a public speaker. He's happy to discuss *Family Dog*, which is planned (but delayed by production problems) for midseason replacement. But he's up front in admitting that "the communication thing" is not his forte.

One of a handful of well-received episodes from Spielberg's 1985 anthology series, *Amazing Stories*, *Family Dog*, written and directed by

Brad Bird (who has no direct involvement with this show) concerned a hapless canine—with neither a name nor a pedigree to call his own—who is overlooked and underappreciated by his human owners, the Binfordes. So delighted was Universal by the critical and audience response to the episode that it turned the first eight (and best) minutes of the show into a short which ran alongside the studio's Christmas 1988 animated offering, *The Land Before Time*.

That being the case, one might wonder why it took so long for *Family Dog* to become a series. Marvin Levy, marketing director at Amblin, ascribes it to timing. "It wasn't something that the people [at Amblin] spent much time thinking about, as far as turning it into a series," he says. "It was just one of those back-burner kinds of ideas—

they knew it could happen if the marketplace and the audience were there. But there wasn't a big market at the time for animated shows, at least from a primetime perspective. As it happened, with each year that passed since that episode first aired, there was a whole shift in attitude toward animation—both theatrically and on TV. Certainly, the success of *The Simpsons* helped create an atmosphere that made it feasible [to go ahead with *Family Dog* as a primetime program]."

The series has a unique point-of-view, both literally and figuratively, according to Levy. "It's a look at an aspect of contemporary society, the family, from a totally different perspective—namely, the perspective of their dog. He's going to observe the morals, the mores, the comings and goings, of an average American family. Through



The Binfords still tend to ignore the dog, but they won't be as mean to him as they were in the *Amazing Stories* segment.

with regard to the dog's human family. In the pilot, the Binfords—Skip (Stan Freberg), Bev (Annie Potts), Billy and Buffy—are portrayed as a typically dysfunctional American family. In the series, they're more wholesomely integrated. "They're *not* dysfunctional—they're a functional family," Klein comments. "The mother and father [now voiced by Martin Mull and TV's *Harry & the Hendersons* Molly Cheek] love each other and aren't nasty to one another or competitive with each other. They love their children, and their children love them.

"There was a lot of emphasis in the *Amazing Stories* episode on the family's behavior, which acted as a catalyst for the dog's angst. I've shifted the focus somewhat. The family is now not so much mean to the dog as they take the dog for granted and ignore him—which is why they haven't even bothered naming him. He knows that he's not going to get the kind of attention and affection he's looking for from human beings.

"If I had to compare it to something animated, I would say it's closer to a Bugs Bunny cartoon than to *Rocky & Bullwinkle*. But what we're doing different, I think, from any other animated show is, we're using animation to take people into a very specific world: that of a dog. We're *not* going to have him say funny things, or try to humanize him. The dog is a simple soul, so to me it's like writing for a great silent movie star, like Buster Keaton or Harold Lloyd."

Family Dog is also unlike traditional sitcoms in its construction, adds Klein. "The stories are simple—they're not based on clever dialogue or conventional comedy rhythms. I've always wanted to write about the basic truths of human existence, but I've never found a way to do that and make it funny and interesting and not pretentious. In writing about a dog's life, I am able to accomplish that, since that's all a dog's life is all about: the basics of existence. All the dog is concerned with is getting enough to eat and staying warm and meeting female dogs that come his way. The challenge is trying to make it funny and interesting while telling his story in a way that gives him dignity but is also true to the dirty, scuzzy life of a dog.

"This dog is a sort of Everydog—he's as identifiable as Jimmy Stewart in the Frank Capra movies and hopefully, just as lovable. In fact, maybe we could get Jimmy Stewart to do the barks.

"You're meant to view him as a charming and, hopefully, root for him, the way you would if you were watch-

the dog, we're going to take a different look at ourselves, and certainly a different look at pets and animals. Much of the series relates to what Family Dog is thinking at any given moment. It definitely has a 'bite' to it. It's without question a series that can be enjoyed on multiple levels."

Klein isn't exactly sure why his name came up when Burton and Spielberg began their search for a writer, other than the fact that he is a friend of Burton's and has a track record of writing for "freaky, weird, off-center" TV shows like *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* (where he served as head writer, creative consultant and occasional director) and *Buffalo Bill* (co-producer and occasional director). It was two years ago that he was contacted about *Family Dog* by the president of Universal TV, Kerry McCluggage, who proposed a meeting between Klein and the two directors.

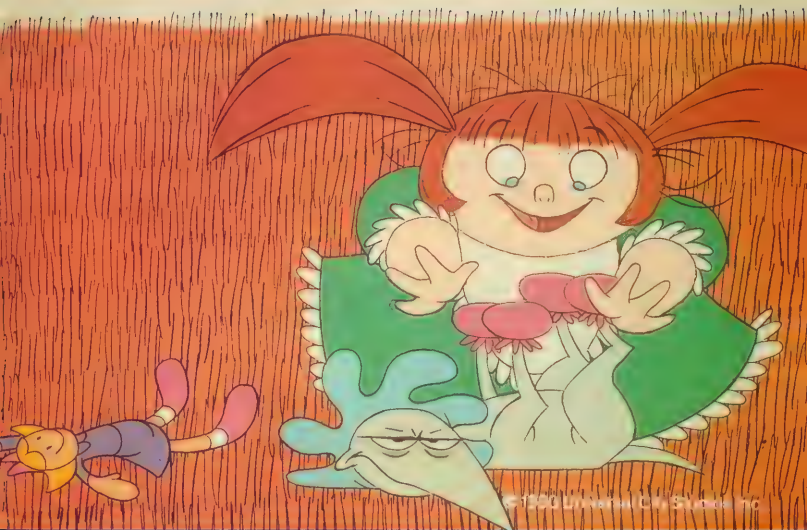
"I wanted to meet with the two of them for the same reason I wanted to hear the song that Paul McCartney and Elvis Costello did together: because it seemed to me an unlikely collaboration," Klein explains. "I've known Tim for some years, and I thought it would be good fun to work with him. As for

Steven, my first thought was, 'There's probably no way—given the stuff he does and the stuff that I do, and how different they are—that we can really work together.' He didn't seem to be a fan of the offbeat."

Klein was pleasantly surprised by the meeting. "It was a lot of fun, it was a ball. It turned out, amazingly, that the three of us actually saw this series the same way. We had a lot to say to each other about what the dog should and shouldn't do, where the comedy and the drama should come from, the kinds of stories we wanted to tell. Basically, we all seemed to be in agreement about everything we discussed."

Once his services were procured, Klein went off and wrote all 13 of the episodes ordered by CBS. "After [Burton and Spielberg] saw the first three scripts or so, they were happy with the way the writing was going, so they pretty much left me alone. It makes everything very simple, and eliminates the need for meetings, committees, political machinations. I've never been interested in working in an assembly-line kind of situation."

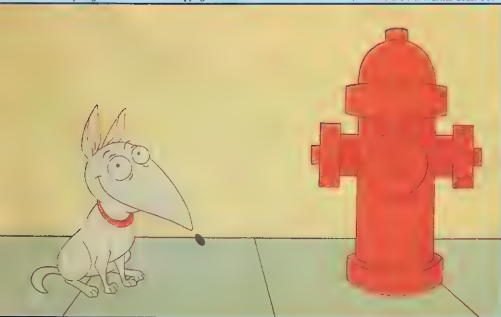
In adapting the original episode for a multiple run, Klein felt that a few changes were in order, specifically



Family Dog takes "a different look at ourselves, and certainly a different look at pets and animals," says Amblin's Marvin Levy.



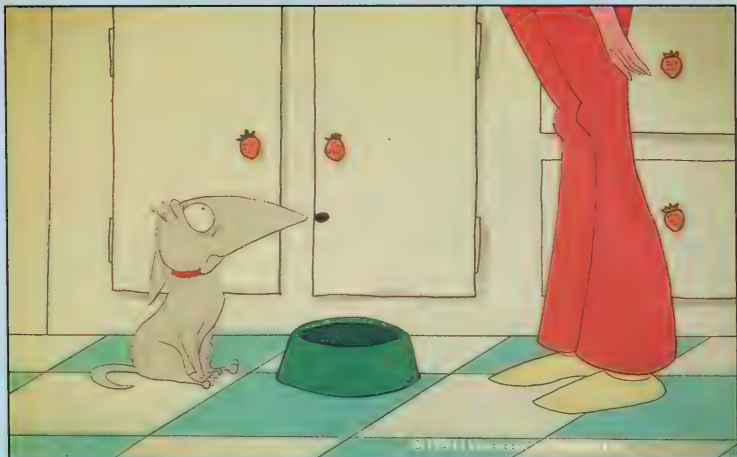
All *Family Dog* Characters & Art: Copyright 1990, 1991 Amblin Entertainment, Universal TV & Warner Bros. TV.



Eating, staying warm and picking up female dogs is all *Family Dog* cares about.

ing *The Honeymooners* and rooting for Ralph Kramden, clearly knowing that Ralph has some jerky ideas. If you could think of Louise Lasser as having four paws and a tail, then you can see how I could do a show like *Family Dog*. I understand, and have compassion for, someone like Mary Hartman, who feels the need to wash not only the top of her kitchen table but also the underside. There's something both funny and endearing about a person like that. This is a dog you can sympathize with. He's very sweet, very innocent. He's a good dog, but completely ignored."

Sitcom or not, *Family Dog*'s plots involve situations ripe with comic possibilities. In one episode, the put-upon mutt falls head over paws for a female pooch whose owners are moving away that very day. In another, he accidentally breaks the family's big-screen TV. A third has the Binfords trying to determine who actually belongs to Family Dog, with none willing to claim ownership. In a fourth, "Call of the Mild," Family Dog runs off with a pack of strays, only to discover



The dog survives his problems, but doesn't necessarily "end up overcoming" them, says producer Chuck Richardson.

All Family Dog Art: Copyright 1990, 1991 CBS

that he's not cut out for the wild life.

Though the series is called *Family Dog*, it will by no means be a one-joke, one-setting program, Klein promises. "For those 13 episodes at least, we found plenty of places for the dog to go. He doesn't spend all that much time in the house. He's out in the yard, he dreams of his ancestors and of the stars in the sky, of running with other dogs. He has troubles with the dog across the way, who's much bigger and tougher than he is and intimidates him. He makes friends with the birds in the trees. I'm hesitant to talk about it too much, lest it sound like a Disney nature show or a boring installment of *National Geographic*."

It's unlikely, given *Family Dog*'s skewed, off-the-wall edge, that viewers will confuse the show with either. This is, after all, a series that doesn't shy away from depicting canine courtship rituals, or refrain from dealing with *Family Dog*'s bodily functions—as was depicted in the pilot, where he "whizzes" on the living room carpet in hopes of being let outside. Klein points out that the show will be honest without being gratuitous, which is no doubt why he enjoys a good working relationship with the network's watchdog agency, Standards and Practices.

"Standards and Practices has been very kind to us in letting us do stuff that on other shows, they would clamp down on. They realize that we're trying to be true to a dog's life, and that involves stuff that's not as, uh, delicate as most television. When Skip loses his

wedding ring and the dog accidentally swallows it, we follow the trail of the wedding ring *through* the dog's innards, and we see all kinds of things that the dog has swallowed. The only request that the Standards and Practices people made was that we not show the dog's actual butt, which I thought was very reasonable.

"As far as the *Family Dog*'s attempts to romance a female dog, they greet each other and check each other out like real dogs do. It'll be clear in the show that that's what's happening. We're not going to cut to a train roaring through a tunnel to make our point."

Klein defines Burton and Spielberg's day-to-day involvement with *Family Dog* thusly: "They're there when I need them. Steven reads everything and gives me notes on my scripts, and he makes comments to the animators about the animation and camera angles and stuff. Tim is very much focused on the dog—that's all he cares about, which is as it should be, since the dog is central to the show. He works with the animators on the storyboards, the visual stuff."

On the art end, Chris Buck—who worked on the *Amazing Stories* segment with Brad Bird—is back as animating director. (He also directs the voice sessions, along with Klein.) A facility was set up through Warner Bros. by *Family Dog* producer Chuck Richardson in Glendale. It is there that the program's storyboards and back-

(continued on page 66)

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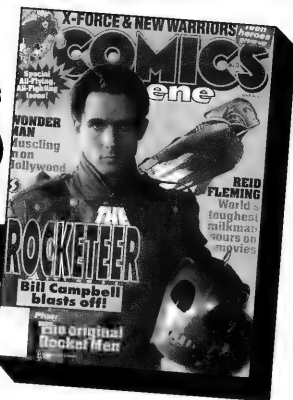
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Woolverton

(continued from page 56)

specifics other than to add, "Sometimes we would go up creatively against each other. But in the end, it contributed [to the movie]. We all agree now that all the passion and the disagreements we had came from our desire to make this a great movie."

Next for Woolverton are two more Disney projects. The first is a live-action film called *The Incredible Journey*, a rewrite of a Caroline (*The Addams Family*) Thompson script. Based on a book and a movie made by the studio in 1963, it concerns, in the writer's words, "three pets—a puppy, an old dog and a Siamese cat—who get separated from their human family and travel incredible amounts of miles across the Sierras to get home."

Woolverton is now hard at work on her second animated feature, tentatively titled *King of the Jungle*, a coming-of-age musical set in Africa directed by Roger Allers (one of *Beauty & the Beast*'s artistic supervisors) and George Scribner (director of *Oliver & Company*), with lyrics by Tony Award-winner Tim Rice. Due for release in 1993, it revolves around a lion cub named Simba, who inherits his father's kingdom and has it wrested away by a ruthless brother. Woolverton is the third writer to be brought in to lick the project's story problems.

"Again, we're treading new ground here. It'll have a very naturalistic setting like *Bambi*, but we're also having the characters sing. How do you make naturalistic lions sing? That's our challenge. I'm working on the third act now. The first act is getting boarded, the second act has been written, and I'm doing rewrites on that."

The proud mother of a new baby girl christened Keaton, Woolverton has traded in her home office for a desk at the Disney Studios, where she is under contract. Working for Disney "feels very nice. I feel really lucky to have the opportunity to write movies that are going to be seen by so many people the world over."

But writing screenplays for children of all ages doesn't mean that Linda Woolverton isn't interested in producing more adult fare. "There's a lot of Belle in me. I do want to go off in the world and have new challenges and try my hand at new things. I have plans to continue to write different kinds of adult scripts as well as more family scripts. I haven't written a book in years—it's very upsetting. But I have to think about the millions of people who will see *Beauty & the Beast*, and remember that I was a part of its creation. That is its own reward." **CS**

Dog

(continued from page 64)

ground layouts are prepared, as well as all "key posing and timing" of the animation. Due to the cost involved in creating a weekly animated series, the final animation, clean-up and ink and paint work is being done in Taiwan.

Richardson assesses the show's animation as "stylized. It's simplified but not limited, in the way that *Rocky & Bullwinkle* was limited. That kind of animation works from pose to pose. *The Simpsons* works that way too, and relies upon dialogue to carry what's going on—it's constructed like a sitcom. Our show isn't a sitcom show—it's not joke-oriented or gag-oriented. It's not a story about a family and their interactions; it's a story about a dog and his day-to-day experiences. Comparing us to *The Simpsons* is like comparing apples and oranges.

"We're not trying to portray a real dog; it's obviously a cartoon dog. We're caricaturing attitudes and poses. We're after, I think, a kind of animation that expresses, as simply as possible, the dog's key emotional states. The dog is not a Garfield character—he doesn't talk, he doesn't think out loud. He's always a dog. So, the show's whole approach—from the writing to the animation—is from the dog's point-of-view, moreso even than the *Amazing Stories* episode. We're looking at the dog as a full-fledged actor."

Family Dog is nothing if not, in Richardson's words, "weird." "It's idiosyncratic. This show is about the triumph of survival, of getting by. Most TV shows start with a problem at the beginning and, 23 minutes later, the problem is resolved and everybody's happy. *Family Dog* doesn't work that way. We introduce a problem and show the dog surviving that problem. But he doesn't end up winning or overcoming the problem. If the problem is that he's lonely and needs a girl friend, at the show's end, he's still lonely. The story resolutions are more real. We're not offering quick, easy answers."

There's nothing "quick and easy" about doing an animated series, Dennis Klein insists. "I'm finding animation to have two phases," he says, priming readers for a punchline. "Phase One: No way of knowing. Phase Two: Too late to do anything about."

And what does he wish for, as far as *Family Dog*? "I hope it makes people see humor in the simple things in life. I hope they enjoy the show on a human level, and not just think they're watching a funny version of *Lassie*. And I hope that, instead of turning their TVs off when the show is over, people watch all the other CBS shows that follow *Family Dog*." **CS**

Liefeld

(continued from page 24)

Titans editor [Jonathan Peterson] about doing this for DC, entered negotiations and sent some drawings and character designs."

Liefeld went into the negotiations with a set creative team for the book, but unfortunately, things didn't work out the way he planned. "[DC said, 'We don't want to do this. We want to do this. We want to use your characters and your concepts, but we want it to be done this way.' My attitude was, 'Look, if it's not broke, don't fix it.' It just got ridiculous. Negotiations fell off, and I said, 'OK. Well, what I've got here is some real strong stuff,' so I just bounced it into *Youngblood*. So, yes, many of the characters you'll see in *Youngblood* were to be part of a new Teen Titans team that I would have created from the ground up. It would have just tied in to the Titans universe. Some of these characters would have fit perfectly into the DC universe, but unfortunately, that's not the way it goes."

Working with Malibu has gone much more smoothly for *Youngblood*'s creator. "I'm excited to be working with Malibu," he says. "Those guys have as much, if not more, enthusiasm than I do. They've shown that they're really excited about doing this project, and they've always done the best they possibly can with everything they've handled. They always treat their creators and their creators' properties with respect, and I knew I would be in good hands, so I'm more than happy to be working with them."

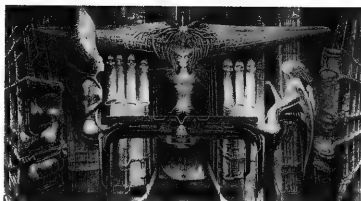
Happy enough to do an ongoing *Youngblood* series, if sales warrant? "Well, the plans right now are to have *Brigade* immediately follow *Youngblood*," he says. "After that, I'll come back for a new *Youngblood* mini-series, which are all I can conceive of doing at this time."

"If *Youngblood* is successful, I will have to seriously think about pursuing it on a full-time basis. You can tell by how long-winded I've been that I'm very enthusiastic about [the project]. It has been in my mind for over five years. I really hope it goes over well, but I'm not going to define how successful it is by whether or not it sells a *bizillion* copies. If there's a loyal following for this book out there, then I'll look at doing it full-time."

"*Youngblood* has a very large cast with many characters, but I think it's gonna be real fun," Rob Liefeld predicts. "That's essentially all it is: *Fun*. This whole mini-series is basically things that made me go 'Hmmm,' all in a universe where I can dictate what goes 'on where, with whom and why.'" **CS**

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COMICS screen

All projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new/updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** Legend: S: script; D: director; P: producer; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; MWS: Murakami Wolf Swenson; RB: Rankin-Bass; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; UF: Universal; Col: Columbia; FF: Funnybook Films. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 1/10/92)

□ **The Addams Family.** Sequel. Possible Halloween Release. AN series. ABC. HB Fall '92.

The Airtight Garage. AN. S: Randy Lofficier.

Aladdin. AN film. WD. '92. Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov. S: Daniel.

Alley Oop. Film. Col.

The American. Film. P: Joel Silver. S: Mark Verheiden.

American Flag! Film. Ant-Man. Film.

Archie. LA Film. S: N. & D. Ephron. D: J. Schumacher. DIC.

Baby Huey. AN short. U. S: Bill Kopp.

Barbarella. TV. Nel.

Barbie. Film. Abrams/Gentile Ent. & Mattel.

□ **Batman.** *Batman Returns.* S: Dan Waters. D: Tim Burton.

WB. June. AN series. '92 Fox.

Battletoads. TV pilot.

Bebe's Kids. AN film. S: Reginald Hudlin. Hyperion/PP.

Beetle Bailey. Film.

Beetlejuice. AN series. ABC, video & FBC. Film sequel.

Betty Boop. Film. D: R. Fleischer.

Blackhawk. Film. Amblin.

S: Dan Aykroyd.

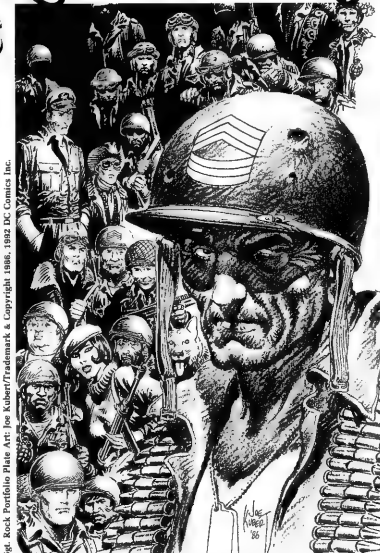
Blackman. Film.

Blade. Film. S: Lee Goldberg & William Rabkin.

Blinky Bill. Australian AN film. P: Yoram Gross. '92.

□ **Blondie.** Film musical.

S: Alfred Uhry. P: Francine LeFrak. Dean Young. Seeks new studio.



As World War II is remembered again, Sgt. Rock gets closer to cinematic service.

Bloom County. AN TV specials. Amblin/U. CBS.

James Bond. Syn AN series, *James Bond Jr.* MWS.

Bonkers D. Bobcat. Syn AN series. WD.

Boogiemanland. AN. Nel. Fox.

Bucky O'Hare. Syn AN.

□ **Bugs Bunny.** New theatrical shorts. *Termites Terrace.*

LA/AN film. D: Joe Dante. Based on Chuck Amuck.

Bullwinkle. *Boris & Natasha* film. Release delayed.

□ **Capitol Critters.** AN series. P: S. Bocho/HH. ABC. Now airing.

Captain America. Film.

Captain Planet. AN series.

Casper. Film. Amblin.

Charlie Chan. Film. S/D: David Mamet. P: G. Kirkwood, J. Hyde.

Chester Cheetah. AN. Nel. Fox.

Chicken Man. AN spoof series. Calico.

City of Darkness. Film. S: Patrick Cirillo & Joe Gayton.

P: M. Douglas, R. Bieber. Col.

□ **Classics Illustrated.** AN series. DIC.

Cobalt 60. AN film.

□ **Conan.** Film sequel. S: Charles Edward Pogue.

Conan the Adventurer. Syn AN series. Half-hour. 13 episodes. Bows fall. Claster TV/Sunbow.

Concrete. Film. S: (D) L. Wilson, C. Thompson. P: Tim Burton.

Cool World. AN/LA film. PP. D: Ralph Bakshi.

□ **The Crow.** Film. S: John Shirley. D: Alex Proyca. P: Ed Pressman. (see article)

□ **Crusader Rabbit.** New AN series. Being developed for Fox.

Danger Squad. Film. P/D: Leo Fong. W/D: P.R. Cable.

Darkwing Duck. AN syn & ABC series.

Deathlok. Film.

Defenders of Dynaton City. AN half-hour. LucasArts.

□ **Dennis the Menace.** Film. P: John Hughes. WB. *Dennis the Musical.* Broadway. S: Ernest Chambers. Music: Jeff Church.

Lyrics: Richard Enquist, Chambers. Fall '92?

Dinosaurs for Hire. Film. S: Richard Finney & James Bonny.

Fox. FX: Henson C Shop.

□ **Dr. Off.** Film. Black superhero spoof. P: Tim Reid.

Dr. Strange. Film. Zoetrope.

D: Alex Cox. P: F. Coppola.

□ **Doug.** AN. Nickelodeon ordered 26 new episodes.

Drawn Together. TV sitcom pilot. Cartoonist's character comes to life. S: Kelly Kulchak.

Dreamwalker. CBS TV film.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. PP. Elfquest. Film/TV. Abby Lou Prod. Freedom Distrib.

Evangeline. Film. FF.

□ **Family Dog.** AN series. CBS. Amblin/Nel. (see article)

□ **Fantastic Four.** Film. EP: Stan Lee. Constantin Film.

Far Side. AN TV.

Fearless Fostick. LA. Nel.

Fish Police. AN series. HB.

CBS. Mid-season. S: J. Romano.

The Flintstones. Film. Fred: John Goodman. D: Richard Donner. U/Amblin. AN TV film. S: J. Romano.

Garfield. AN series.

G.I. Joe. Film. S: Anthony & John Gentile. WB.

Goofy. Syn AN series *Goof Troop*. WD.

The Green Arrow. TV.

The Green Hornet. Film. S: D. Mancini. P: D. Kirschner. U.

Grimjack. Film.

Gumby. Film.

Hopalong Cassidy. Film. S: G. Popper, J. Rosenthal.

□ **Human Target.** Series. ABC. R. Springfield, C. Clemons. P: D. Bilson, P. De Meo, L. Lyttle.

For mid-season.

Inspector Gadget. LA TV series. DIC. Family Channel.

Iron Man. Film. U.

The Jetsons. LA film. U.

Jo Jo. Film. P: Lee Caplin.

S: Mike Chapman.

Jonny Quest. Film. U.

Judge Dredd. Film. Fox. S: H. Chaykin & J. Moore. P: C. Lippincott. For '93.

Kaanga. Film. S: (D) Geoff Edwards, S. Bernard. P: L. Caplin, B. Edwards, T. Adams.

Li'l Abner. TV. P: Max & Micheline Keller.

Little Mermaid. AN prequel TV series. Fall '92. WD.

Little Nemo. AN film. TMS Ent./Hemdale. June.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Film. D: John Bruno. P: Ed Pressman. S: Bill Wisher.

Lucky Luke. TV series. Terence Hill. SB Comm.

Mai the Psychic Girl. Film. D: Tim Burton. S: L. Wilson, C. Thompson. P: Burton, Wilson, D. Di Novi, W. Hill. Carolco.

Mandrake. Film. The Mask. Film. New Line.

Mr. A. Video.

Mr. Magoo. Film. P: S. Tisch. AN/LA.

Mr. X. Film. P: Jim Cash & Jack Epps Jr.

Monster in My Pocket. AN. HB. ABC. S: Glenn Leopold.

Mother Goose & Grimm. AN series. CBS.

Nancy. Film. P: P. Muller.

Negative Man. Bob Kane hero. LA series. Nel.

Neil the Horse. AN/LA.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD. Film. S: Greg Pruss.

Ninja High School. AN video. U.K. Sun Planning.

Joe Palooka. Musical.

Paparazzi Samurai. AN TV series. P: DIC, Abrams/Gentile.

Peanuts. New AN TV specials. AN film.

The Phantom. Film. P: B. Sherlock, P. Sjoquist, J. Torv, R. Price. S: Ken Shadie. Lee Falk, con. D: Simon Wincer.

Pico & Columbus. AN film. Bavaria Film.

Pirates of Dark Water. AN series. ABC. HB.

Power Pack. TV pilot.

S: J. Brett. N World/Paragon.

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Amblin.

Prince Valiant. AN series. Family Channel. Film. S: Michael Beckner. Constantin Film. P: Bernd Eichinger.

The Provler. Film. FF.

The Punisher. Sequel?

Radio Boy. AN. RB.

Reid Fleming. Film.

S: creator David Boswell.

P: M. Weisman. J. Loeb II.

Ren & Stimpy. AN.

Nickelodeon ordered 20 more episodes for '92.

Richie Rich. Film. P: J. Silver. J. Davis. S: Neil Tolkin.

RoboCop 3. S: Frank Miller & Fred Dekker (D). Summer.

Roger Rabbit. Prequel film. *Who Discovered Roger Rabbit.*

D: Rob Minkoff. WD. New short "Hare in My Soup."

Rogue Trooper. Film. D: Peter Hewitt. P: Joel Silver.

Rugrats. AN. Nickelodeon ordered 26 new episodes.

Rupert the Bear. AN. Nel. 13 half-hours.

The Saint. Film. S: Terry Hayes. D: Renny Harlin. P: Robert Evans. PP.

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Steven Bochco's *Capitol Critters* have moved into the White House on ABC.

Scooby Doo. Film. WB.

Secret Agent X-9. AN film.

Sgt. Kabukiman. AN series. Troma. DIC.

Sgt. Preston. TV revival.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver. Bob Zemeckis. WB.

The Shadow. Film. S: David Koepf. P: Martin Bregman. U.

The She-Hulk. Film. S/D: Larry Cohen. B. Nielsen.

The Silver Surfer. Film. EP: Stan Lee. Constantin Film.

The Simpsons. AN. FBC.

Speed Racer. Film. S: (D) Patrick Johnson, John Lau. P: J. Silver, Richard Donner. WB.

Spider-Man. Film. D: Jim Cameron. Carolco. Stage musical. S & lyrics: B. Harman.

Music: K. Hermann. EXP: Stan Lee. D: J. Nash, J. Calamari.

Starwatcher. AN film. P: Alain Guiot/Videosystem. S: Moebius (D) & J. Fryzman.

Sub-Mariner. Film.

Superboy. Syn TV.

Super-Dave. AN. DIC.

Superman. *Superman: The New Movie.* S: Mark Jones & Cary Bates. To lense in FL.

Super Mario Bros. LA film. S: Barry Morrow, D. DeVito.

Swamp Thing. TV. USA.

Tales from the Crypt. HBO. Renewed for 4th season. 12 episodes.

Tales from the Hart. TV. P: Aaron Spelling.

Tarzan. Syn TV series.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. LA sequel begins filming in June. AN series. CBS & Syn.



Look for the *Defenders of Dynatron City* in their own TV special this month—not to mention in a new Marvel Comic and as a Nintendo game.

Terry & the Pirates. Film. S: J. Feiffer. P: G. Kirkwood, J. Hyde. EXP: S. Weston.

Thor. Film. Stonebridge.

Time Beavers. AN TV series. Kushner-Locke.

Tintin. AN series. HBO.

Tom & Jerry. AN film. P/D: Phil Roman. Summer.

Toxic Crusaders. LA film. Troma/New Line.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox/FF. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones, P: M. Pepler, N. Tabachnick.

Two-Fisted Tales. Fox finally aired TV series pilot in January. Apparently dead.

Ultraman. 13 new half-hour TV episodes. (see article)

Valentina. TV series.

Vampirella. Film. S/D: Jim Wynorski.

V for Vendetta. Film. WB.

S: Hilary Henkin.

WARP. Film. S/P: Mark Victor & Michael Grais.

Watchmen. Film. P: J. Silver. D: T. Gilliam.

We're Back. AN film. Amblin London/U.

Why I Hate Saturn. TV.

Wild Cards. Film. Disney.

S: George R.R. Martin. P: Michael Engelberg.

Wizard of Id. Film. Cinergi.

Wolverine. Film.

The X-Men. Film. Carolco.

P: Jim Cameron. Fox TV reconsidering AN TV series version.

Yogi Bear. Yo! Yogi. AN TV series. HB. NBC.

Zen. Film. AN series.

Zorro. Film. D: Steven Spielberg. S: Nancy Larson. Tri-Star. TV series. Family Chan.

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